

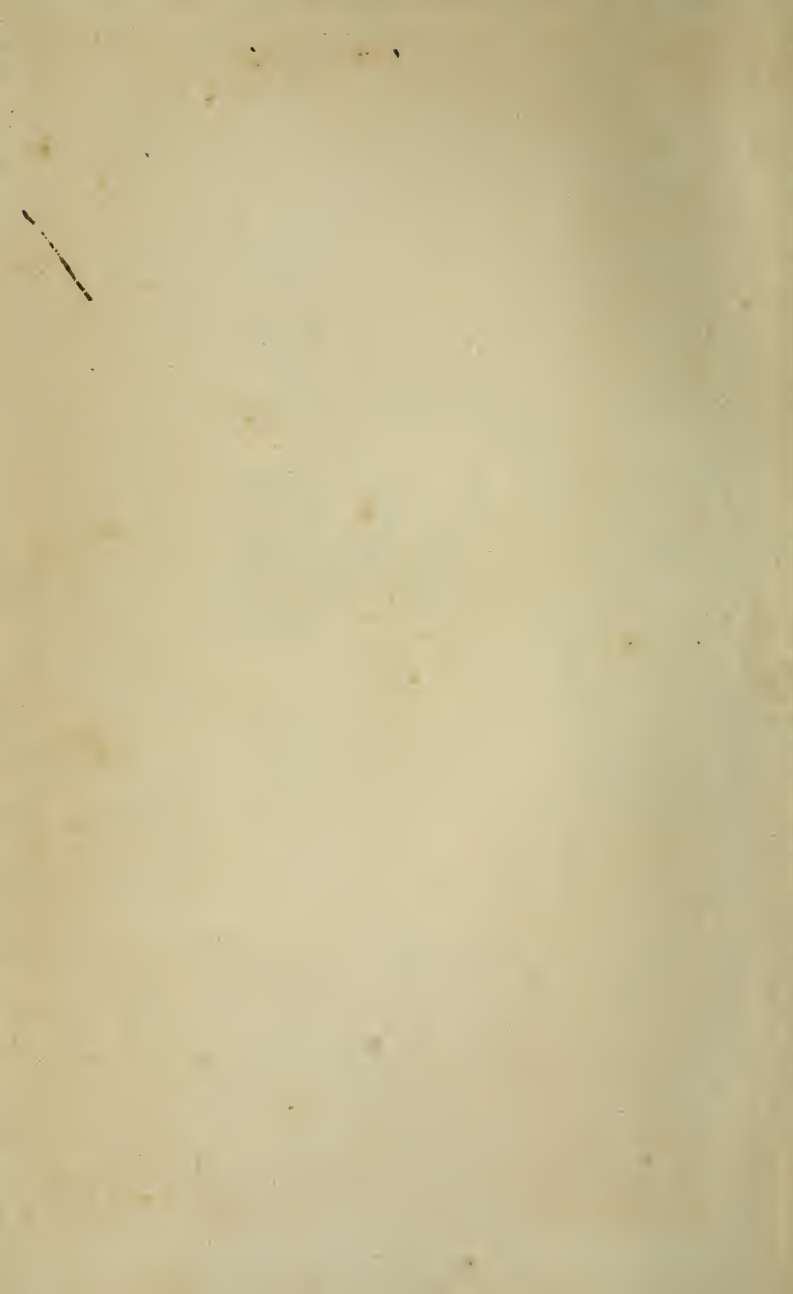




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*M. H. H. Guide  
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THAT OTHER PERSON

*1884*

A Novel

BY

MRS ALFRED HUNT

AUTHOR OF 'THORNICROFT'S MODEL' 'THE LEADEN CASKET' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

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# THAT OTHER PERSON.

## CHAPTER XXV.

‘WHOSE WORDS ARE YOU QUOTING?’

She, like a moon in wane,  
Faded before him, cowered; nor could restrain  
Her fearful sobs, self-folding like a flower  
That sinks into itself at evening hour.—KEATS.

AFTER a while it occurred to Zeph that her husband was dull—that he was bored by the want of some interest beyond that of the daily routine of gaiety and the petty amount of business that falls to the lot of a man who has what is called nothing to do. But ought he not to have something to do? He was almost the only man she knew who was not living in a whirl of occupation from which it seemed almost impossible to rescue five minutes except

at stated times. 'Godfrey,' she said one morning, 'I wonder why you don't go into Parliament. Wouldn't you like to do so?'

'Of course I should. There is nothing I should like better.'

'Then why not do it?' inquired Zeph.

'Dear Zeph, you surely know why I cannot. You know how strangely I am situated. I can only go as a peer, and of course I won't do that.'

Zeph sighed, and said, 'What a pity! It is a life that would suit you exactly! How vexing to have to give it up.'

'It is no use thinking about it,' said he. 'It cannot be helped.'

'I suppose not,' said Zeph; 'you seem to be always giving up things! But you have many resources; if you had not, I should pity you for having to spend so much time with me. I am a very poor companion for a man like you.'

That, of course, he would not allow her to say. Then she asked him what he had done in the mornings before she came.

'I used to try to do some water-colour work,' said he, with a backward glance of memory at those happy mornings with Hester.

'Then why cannot you do that now? I wish I could. I am so fond of water-colours. I do wish you would let me see some of yours.'

With a curious sense of disinterring a portion of life that had long been dead and buried, he brought a folio and put it on a chair before her. She slowly turned over the sketches, making much havoc of the pronunciation of certain names of foreign places. He, too, looked over her shoulder at them for some time; but the sight became painful to him, for he had never forgiven himself for his ill-treatment of poor Hester.

'Don't turn away from them, dear,' said Zeph, 'I do so want you to tell me the names of the places. You need not pretend to be ashamed of the pictures, for they are very good.'

He came back to the folio, but his thoughts were with the girl whom he had brought away

from the mountains to make miserable. Was she now supporting herself by painting? She had gratefully, but absolutely, refused to accept a penny from him, when he had, through Mr. Blackmore and Dr. Simonds, offered her a liberal income. Her refusal had added a deeper regret to his memory of her, for at least it would have been a comfort to him to know that she was well off. The sketches he was now turning over for Zeph reminded him of so many circumstances which had taken place while they were being painted—so many acts of loving kindness and unselfish devotion, that he soon ceased to be aware of what he was supposed to be doing, and forgot to turn to a new sketch. He hoped that Hester was selling her drawings and feeling no touch of poverty. The idea that such a thing was possible was exceedingly bitter to him. He had more than once looked in at Winthrop's and at other dealers' exhibitions, but had never seen a drawing by Miss Langdale. Where could she have found a shelter? He did not know how

long this fit of abstraction had lasted. Zeph was wondering what could have caused it. She had for some time been glancing furtively at him, and she could not fail to see that his eyes were dull, troubled, and full of regret, and his mind evidently full of sadness. She had heard him sigh more than once, and had no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that the sight of these sketches stirred up recollections and emotions that were painful. What right had they to be so painful, was her indignant thought? Shame she expected him to feel, but not regret.

'Godfrey,' she said with some resentment, 'you don't like looking at these old things!'

'No,' he replied, rousing himself with an effort, 'I don't think I do.'

'Tell me why,' said she.

She looked in his face as she spoke—he in hers. The eyes of both fell almost instantly—neither of them could sustain the gaze of the other. The eyes of each would reveal to the other thoughts and feelings that were to be

concealed. Zeph's betrayed a knowledge of something that made her angry and unhappy—his, a deep and abiding regret. He tried to answer her question lightly, and said,

‘They all look so awfully bad when I see them again!’

‘Oh, no, Godfrey, don't say that—you can't mean it.’

‘I do; and besides, no one ever does like to see things done long ago—there is always something melancholy about it.’

‘But why?’ persisted Zeph.

‘Oh, circumstances have changed; people have changed; you yourself have changed—everything is different.’

‘But if everything is better?’

‘Everything is not always better; it is sometimes quite the other way.’

He had not said this with any personal meaning, but was only speaking generally. She chose to take it as expressing his sense of her own inferiority to that other person, and was deeply hurt and offended.

'Don't let us think of looking at them,' said she, in a voice that sounded somewhat angry, but showed a very small part of the vexation she felt.

'Oh, why not go on?' he exclaimed, determined to conquer his feelings. And he had his way, and persisted in showing the sketches to the end. They were principally of foreign places, and Zeph recognised many as towns which Godfrey had found reasons for not visiting when they were abroad together, though she had wished to see them. Now she began to think she knew the reason why he avoided them, and was almost as absent as her husband had been a while before. She was brooding over what she was pleased to call her wrongs. That person who had been with him when he made those sketches still occupied his thoughts—recollections of her were intimately associated with them. No doubt she had been able to sketch, too. They had spent happy quiet days beneath the walls of old grey towns and towers set up on high on rocks and mountain-sides—they had wandered here and there. She had

been able to share his work and his pleasure, and to speak French and perhaps German and Italian, and to read all the learned books upstairs, and to talk to him in an educated way, which amused and interested him, while she, his wife, was dull and ignorant, and could do nothing but bore him, and say things that made him ashamed of her.

‘What is the matter, Zeph?’ said Daylesford in his turn. ‘How very silent you have suddenly become!’

‘I am thinking,’ she replied in a voice that was not very sweet.

‘Of what?’ he inquired. But she would vouchsafe no explanation. She pretended not to hear, but to be absorbed in the contemplation of the castle of Bracciano. It was the last sketch in the folio—the last Daylesford had ever touched. Well he remembered doing it, and as he looked at it now he felt the sharp sting of conscience.

‘You did not make any sketches when you were abroad with me?’ said Zeph, more sadly than reproachfully.



Her words startled him, and for an instant he looked almost suspiciously in her face, for her words had seemed to betoken a contrast between what he had done when abroad with her and what he had done when with some one else. She preserved an equable demeanour; there was nothing to be learned by looking at her. He made up his mind that there was nothing to learn, and that she was only expressing a regret.

‘Next time we go I will. I wish you sketched too; take some lessons, and then you will soon be able.’

‘You will never succeed in making me clever,’ said she, bitterly. She was very jealous of what that other had been able to do.

‘Nonsense, Zeph; don’t be so unreasonably humble. You have done wonders with your French and music.’

She shook her head. He took her hand to draw her nearer to him, but had for the moment to content himself with kissing the tips of her fingers, for she had espied something

behind the Bracciano which interested her. He saw what it was with a pang, and wished he had remembered that it was there and could have kept it out of her sight. It was a small flat parcel addressed to Daylesford in a handwriting that was very pretty and a woman's, and Zeph was almost certain that she had seen it before on a letter that came when she was at the Castle.

‘Whose writing is that, Godfrey?’ she asked quickly.

‘I am not sure I know,’ said he, suddenly feeling himself at the end of his resources so far as truth was concerned. ‘Open the parcel, and then perhaps I shall be able to tell you.’

It was the parcel containing the two sketches of Berkhamstead, which Hester had made it a matter of sentiment to do for his brother Marmaduke. Daylesford had thrust them into that folio when he found them on his return from Santa Eulalia, and had never either seen or thought of them since.

Zeph unfolded the paper, saw the drawings,

and straightway administered a blow to her husband's vanity—a blow to which he was by no means insensible.

'Oh, you have done some of the Castle after all!' said she. 'I was wondering why I saw none. These two sketches are a thousand times better done than any of the others. No one would believe that they were by the same person, they are so good.'

'They are not by the same person,' replied Daylesford, recovering himself as best he might. 'They are by a professional—at least I expect she is quite professional by this time. You must have seen some of her things at Winthrop's. She sometimes exhibits there.'

'What is her name?' said Zeph, faint with anxiety, and yet all but certain that, when he answered that question, she would be in possession of that dreaded name.

'Her name is Langdale—Hester Langdale. She is quite young as an artist, but her things are very good.'

'Very!' said Zeph, drawing a long breath,

for the tension was very great. 'And you got these of her?'

'Yes,' he replied, wishing she would not involve him in such a web of untruth by her repeated questions, and yet not feeling able to tell her how and why the drawings had really been done.

'And you sent her to Berkhamstead to make them?' pursued Zeph.

'No—Yes—I can't tell you how they were done. I did not send her, but she may have gone; not that I ever heard of her having done so. It was arranged that they were to be painted, and the rest, of course, was her affair.'

'But she could not do them without seeing the place, could she?'

'I could not; but perhaps she could. She may have been to Berkhamstead; but you had more opportunity than I had of knowing whether she was there or not, for you were there when they were painted, and I was at Santa Eulalia.'

'I never saw any one sketching there,' said

Zeph, beginning to have a faint hope that she had been distressing herself and tormenting her husband about nothing. Then a new fancy seized her, and she said, 'I wish you would give me those drawings, Godfrey. I do like them so much.'

'I cannot do that,' he answered, 'for they are my brother's.'

Daylesford's brother was a very obnoxious person to Daylesford's wife. He was made of too much importance. Nothing of any consequence could ever be done without reference to what he would be likely to feel on the subject, and whether it would in any way, however small, be prejudicial to his interests. Zeph was tired of both his feelings and his interests.

'Everything is your brother's!' she exclaimed pettishly; 'at least everything that I ever happen to want;' and having said that, she let her pretty head droop lower and lower, and sat looking ill-treated and disconsolate.

Daylesford was miserable at once and penitent, and yet he could not bring himself to dis-

regard Hester's wish that his brother should have those drawings. 'They are my brother's,' he repeated, 'so I cannot give them away; but if you would like some drawings of the place, you shall have the best that can be made. I will give a commission to the best artist I know.'

'No, thank you,' said Zeph, rather coldly; 'I like these; but if I cannot have them, never mind. I don't want to take your brother's things, of course.'

Daylesford looked perplexed; he was tempted to give them to her, but it did seem so treacherous to give Hester's drawings to Zeph. Zeph affected to forget her wish, and turned back to Bracciano. Then she said, 'It is a very long time since we have been at Berkhamstead; I suppose we shall go there soon?'

'I have been a great deal more there since I knew you than I ever was before,' said Daylesford.

'It is a pity to go so seldom,' said Zeph. 'There are few places so delightful.'

'Very few; but I want to have it well understood that it is not my place. If I were always there, and Marmaduke always out of the way, people would only associate me with it, and at last they would think it was mine.'

'I sometimes wish it was,' said Zeph, who was out of temper, and could not hide her feelings. 'As it is, no one gets any good of it.'

Daylesford looked at his sweet young wife in some dismay. She had said nothing yet that he could positively object to, but he began to be half afraid that certain thoughts might be lurking behind her words which, if expressed, would for ever rob her of much of his love and respect.

'I suppose we shall go there in a week or two, as a matter of course?' said Zeph, after a brief silence.

'I never go there as a matter of course,' said he.

'Why not? One feels somebody there—all is so old and grand.'

'Zeph! Zeph!' said he, remonstrating

with her as he would have done with a child.

‘Why do you say, “Zeph, Zeph”?’ she exclaimed quickly; ‘those are quite natural feelings. If one has ancestors one ought to enjoy having them; and if one has a splendid old place, one ought to live in it. I made sure that we should go there for part of August and September, and I have almost promised Lady Lucy that she and her husband and all of them shall come while we are there. Don’t look vexed, Godfrey, I could not help it; she all but invited herself. You may be quite sure that I did not want to have her there with us. She is about as tiresome as a woman can be, and those daughters of hers are, if anything, worse.’

‘They are all appallingly dull. I would not have them there for the world if the place really was mine, so why should I have them when it is not?’

‘But, Godfrey, what could I do when she was so persistent? She forced me to invite



her. She would have forced you to do it. She won't be much trouble, she says; she and I will drive about slowly, and rest ourselves after the fatigues of the season.'

'I am afraid she will have to get her rest elsewhere,' remarked Daylesford, ominously.

'But you do go there to shoot sometimes, I know you do,' said Zeph.

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'Of course I do, but I never ask a party. I sometimes go for a day or two with a few bachelor friends, but I never entertain there, and I never will. If we were to go there with an establishment, we should have to entertain the county, and we should at once assume a position to which we have no right.'

'No one says that we have no right to it but you,' replied Zeph, 'and it would be very much nicer for us if we had it. We should be much more thought of and of much more importance, and I really cannot see why we should not. It is not as if your abstaining did your brother Marmaduke any good.'

Zeph had said this without observing that her husband was letting her say what she liked in perfect silence, but that his colour was rising more and more and his hands moving nervously. 'Every one says that,' she added, as a strong reinforcement of what she had said before.

'Who says that?' said Daylesford, with growing anger.

'Oh, every one. Lady Lucy says so for one, and other friends whom I meet in society have often either said or hinted as much to me. They all say that your refusal to take the title and estates is Quixotic, simply Quixotic, and that it does Marmaduke no good. You don't take them, and he cannot, and the result is that neither of you have them.'

'And you, Zeph—would you like me to take them?' he asked very calmly, and yet something in his voice awed her.

'I? Well, yes, I should, but not if it would give you much pain to do it. Certainly not, if it did that ; but if not, of course I should.'

It would be much pleasanter for us to move in society on a more assured footing.'

'Those are not your own words, Zeph,' exclaimed Daylesford. 'Whose words are you quoting?'

'Lady Lucy's. She thinks it is ridiculous self-sacrifice. It is good and kind of you, no doubt, she says, but it is a mere waste of goodness and kindness.'

'And what other persons say the same thing?' asked Daylesford, eagerly.

'Agnes says it sometimes, and so do others.'

'Well, they may say it—one and all of them may say it, and I do not regard their words. There is one thing of which I am quite certain, and that is, that your father would never say such a thing! He is a high-minded and honourable gentleman, and he would utterly despise me if, to please any petty vanity or ambition, I could avail myself of the accident which deprived us of the opportunity of producing my mother's certificate of marriage, and took the title and estates, when taking them

involves the admission of what I know to be utterly false—that my own mother was a woman of light character.’

He had risen to his feet, and was standing looking down on her with bright angry eyes and flushed cheeks. His words came thick and fast, and were spoken under the influence of passionately strong feeling—they seemed to come from the depths of his heart. Never had Zeph seen him look like that before—never had she heard him speak in that angry and excited manner. She dared not meet his eyes—she felt that he was looking down on her, and regarding her as a mean and contemptible creature whose ideas were so base that they could only be heard with loathing. She cowered beneath his gaze, felt the justice of his contempt, wondered at her own unparalleled baseness, and had never admired him so much. She could not speak; once she tried to do so, but her voice failed her. She had never felt so abject in her life. He was standing there full of generous emotion, in which it was only

too evident that he knew she could take no part. He had not said one word of direct reproach to her, and yet his contempt was stabbing her like a knife. He was speaking again.

‘Never let me hear you hint at such a thing again! Never invite people to Berkhamstead, and if no feeling on your own part prompts you to such a course, I entreat you, as my wife, to refuse to listen to all such persons as are mean enough to recommend what is so base. If you have committed yourself to Lady Lucy, I will take a country-house, and you can invite her and her family to stay with you; but Berkhamstead is my brother’s, and always will be so long as I believe in my mother’s truth and purity;’ and having said that, he hastily quitted the room.

He was gone. He had left her without saying another word. She had not expected him to go so abruptly. She had known that he was almost irretrievably shocked by this revelation of her baseness, but she had hoped

that, when his anger was somewhat spent, he would say some word to show that contempt and indignation had not driven out every other feeling, and that, deeply wounded though it was, his love for her was not dead. But he had left her without a word—he had even said something which might prove that he never intended to see her again: ‘You can invite Lady Lucy to stay with you,’ as if he himself would not be there. Perhaps she would never see him more. Perhaps he would at once go to the brother whom he loved above all created beings, and leave her to wear out the rest of her life as best she might.

He was still in the house, she believed, but she dared not follow him to entreat his forgiveness. What, indeed, would it avail her to do so? He would, no doubt, forgive her, but he could not promise to feel for her as he had done before. She had not quite recognised how much her words must convey to him until she had heard his answer. How nobly he had answered her!—how true was all that he had

said! She had never felt so utterly abased before. What fellowship could there henceforth be between them? Presently she heard the house-door shut; he was gone.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

‘BUT YOU SEEM TO HAVE BEEN ENJOYING A  
MYSTERY TOO!’

Whatever be my lady's present, past,  
Or future, this is certain of my soul—  
I love her ! R. BROWNING.

ZEPH felt that she must do something. She could not sit there hour after hour, until he came home, and then not know whether she dared to creep into his presence or not. Perhaps he did not even intend to come home. She rose drearily to her feet, went to her room, and slowly dressed to go out. She would go to her father's house, and if her husband wanted her to return, he would come in search of her.

‘Has your master left any message for me?’ she inquired of the footman.



‘Not any, ma’am; he only said that he should not be in either to luncheon or dinner.’

‘Then I shall not, either,’ said she. ‘Tell him, when he returns, that I have gone to my father’s, and that I shall wait there until he comes for me.’

She left the house at once and walked quickly to Lorne Gardens. Her father and mother were now at home again, and she had already seen them several times. She longed to do so again. Some one was still left in the world to love her so long as those dear ones lived. She climbed up the steep flight of steps at the base of which she had parted from John, but her mind was so full of what had just occurred, that for once she did so without remembering that scene and thinking of him. She was soon admitted, and at once knocked at the study-door. To a married daughter much is permitted.

‘Are you very busy, father?’ she asked.

‘I am always busy, dear,’ he replied, ‘and more so than usual now, for my other work has

accumulated while I was at your husband's place in the country.'

'Don't call it his place,' exclaimed Zeph, hastily. 'It is not his—it is Marmaduke's. I thought you knew.'

'Yes, dear, I know; it was only my way of speaking. It is his brother's, I know. I wish I had succeeded in finding those papers your dear good husband is so anxious about. I hoped till the last, but found nothing.'

'Ah, how I wish you had!' said Zeph, fervently; and then she wondered if, supposing she herself were ever the means of finding them, he would then forgive her.

'I begin to be afraid that nothing is found because there is nothing to find,' said Mrs. Treherne.

Mr. Treherne's mild blue eyes turned on his wife in something very like anger. 'My dear,' said he, solemnly, 'I sincerely hope you do not know what your words imply. That is not a speech a woman should be ready to make.'

What would he think and say if he knew

what words his daughter had that day permitted herself to use? And to Godfrey too! She would have no defender in her father. Her husband was right on that point.

The two recluses had welcomed Zeph when she first went into the room to see them, but now, after these few minutes' conversation, they relapsed into an attitude of wanting to get on with their work. Zeph was very dear to her father, but she could throw no light on mediæval history: her manners were charming, but all his interest was in those of a bygone age, and he had a manuscript lying on the table before him, seen as yet by few, which would teach him much that he was longing to know. He did not want her to go quite away; he would have liked her to sit down and take a pen in her hand, to be ready to write notes if such were wanted, and thus let him continue to have the pleasure of feeling that she was near him; but her poor mind was in such a disturbed state, that she could not trust herself to do anything that involved sitting quiet, so she went upstairs

to her sister Agnes, who was still the only one at home.

Agnes was writing a long letter to Polly. 'Don't let me stop you,' said Zeph; 'I will wait—indeed I am going to stay till quite late,' and fervently she hoped that that would be all.

'Oh, then I will just finish it,' replied Agnes; 'I should like to get it off. She writes so seldom that I don't want to leave her the excuse of saying that it is because I do the same. Zeph, do you think that there is any reason for her writing so seldom?'

'I suppose she has nothing to tell us.'

'Or else so much that she does not know where to begin. That's my idea of it. By-the-by, I met Dr. Simonds this morning, and he said that he and his wife were both wondering what could make John stay at Alnminster after the school had broken up. All schoolmasters go away then, he says.'

'Then John might as well go too. Why doesn't he?' said Zeph, carelessly.

‘I don’t know ; that is one of the things that I can’t help wondering about.’

‘Well, get on with your letter,’ said Zeph, impatiently ; and Agnes began to wish that she had held her tongue.

‘May I go and look at my own poor little old bedroom while you are writing?’ said Zeph, after a silence. ‘I should so like to see it.’

So she went upstairs, marvelling, as she always did marvel now, at the incredible smallness of everything. Her room was unchanged. Every object was familiar, and had once been dear to her. Each represented a sacrifice of some kind which she had been obliged to make before she could afford to buy it, and yet there was not one thing in the whole room which she had thought worth carrying away with her when she married. Before she knew what she was doing, she had seated herself once more on the old black box on which she had done so much hard thinking in the days when she had been so often unhappy. She did

some hard thinking now. How should she bear it if she had to return to her father's house, and occupy this little hole of a room, and live the joy-forsaken life of other days? The chances were that she would have to do it. How should she break this disgraceful fact to her family? She would not do so until the last moment, but if her husband had not come to take her home before eleven, she would know that the time had come to tell what had happened. Never before had she at all realised the value of his love and kindness. He was a friend whose heart had always been open to her. What were all other ties by comparison with her husband's love? She had come home bruised and almost heartbroken—none of her own family had even seen that she was suffering. She had not exchanged a word with any of them for some days, and yet none of them came near her; they seemed perfectly satisfied to let her sit alone in a garret at the top of the house; and yet she was grumbling at what she was thankful for. She was better alone.

‘What a wicked fool I have been!’ she thought. ‘What an incredibly wicked fool! A dear, kind man was good enough to love me, and I had not even the decency to abstain from wounding him in the very tenderest point! He has given me everything. What have I given him? Neither love, nor kindness, nor common courtesy and forbearance.’

She did not know how long she had been alone when Jack, who had now returned home from some holiday expedition, came to tell her that Agnes had finished her letter, and was wishing that she would go down. The sight of Jack was too much for Zeph. She would probably have broken down anyhow, but he converted the probability into a certainty by saying, ‘Why, Zeph, you look just as you used to do before you went away!’

She flung her arms round him and said, ‘And I feel just as I used to do, Jack. I am so unhappy about something, dear, and my head does ache so badly!’ He made her lie down on the bed, and did his best to comfort

her, and Agnes came, and somehow or other the day passed.

‘Had you not better go home?’ suggested Agnes, when evening drew near; ‘you would be more comfortable in your own room. Jack will run and get a cab, and I will go with you and stay an hour or two.’

‘No,’ said Zeph, shaking her head, ‘I have made up my mind to stay here till Godfrey comes for me. It is no use going home; he is out, and won’t be in till late.’ So she lay on the sofa in the drawing-room with her eyes fixed on the clock. Would he come and take her away or not? She dared not show her anxiety. For the most part she was alone with Agnes. Jack went to bed early, and Mrs. Treherne could not leave her husband.

‘It is a quarter to eleven,’ said Zeph, feeling more and more wretched as her hopes began to fade away.

‘In reality it is a quarter past,’ replied Agnes; ‘that clock is half an hour slow.’

Alas, then, all was over, and henceforth she



was to stay where she now was! She turned her face to the wall to hide it from her sister. She heard a sound which made her wish to listen, but she had heard many such sounds, and knew she should only be disappointed again.

‘There is the carriage!’ exclaimed Agnes, suddenly. ‘I am quite sure; I heard it stop.’

The bell rang; he was there. How was she to meet him? She hid her face and lay quite still, trembling at the sound of his step.

‘Poor Zeph has been so ill ever since she came,’ said Agnes. ‘I wanted her to let me take her home, but she would not; she said she must wait here till you came for her.’

Zeph half raised her eyes to his face; she dared not really look at him.

‘I am so sorry you have been so ill,’ said he; ‘you had better come home at once.’

She rose to her feet immediately, but neither looked up nor spoke, and he tenderly led her downstairs and put her in the carriage. ‘Forgive me, Godfrey,’ she said, when the door was

shut and they were left alone ; it was all she could say.

He took her to his heart in a moment, saying, ‘ My darling, you did not mean it, I know.’ His kindness overwhelmed her ; she laid her head on his shoulder in thankfulness, and did not utter one word all the way home.

Was Zeph better for what had occurred ? Infinitely better in some respects, and during that day of misery she had come nearer to loving her husband than ever she had done before. She respected him for the just indignation he had shown, and she had learnt the value of his love. But she was not so happy as she had been before ; she could not forget how she had writhed beneath his scorn, and was perpetually conscious that she had descended to a considerably lower level in his estimation. He was kind—he was more than kind, but an indefinable something had sprung up in his manner, which showed that she was no longer the woman whom he revered,

but the woman whom he loved and meant to be kind to in spite of much that jarred on him. And then he went out alone a great deal more than he had done before, and Zeph, who was beginning to find that his society was necessary to her happiness, felt this acutely, but dared not notice it, for what was she that he should care to bear her company? She was neither educated enough to be an intellectual companion to him, nor yet was she a loving woman who shared his joys and sorrows and sympathised with all his feelings. She had unhappily proved herself lamentably the reverse, and had deliberately wounded him on the one point on which he was most sensitive, and earned his contempt by showing him that the principles of honour and delicacy which governed his life were to her a dead letter. She could not tell him that she had spoken thoughtlessly, and had not expressed her true feelings. She was too honest to do that, for it was not the fact. There had been a time when she admired Daylesford for his

behaviour with respect to the title and estates, but intercourse with the great world had stimulated her ambition more and more. She had learned the value of honours and dignities, and wealth and power, and had begun to regret the waste of those which belonged of right to the Daylesford family. If Marmaduke could have profited by his younger brother's devotion, Zeph would have viewed her husband's sacrifice calmly, nay more than calmly; but Marmaduke was an exile, and would probably never return to England; the title was in abeyance, the money accumulating no one knew for whom; the Castle shut up, and all benefit from this great inheritance lost to both. Why should not her husband take what the law had declared to be justly his? She had more friends than one in the great world who had expressed this opinion to her without the least hesitation, and gradually she had begun to share it. She felt very differently now that Godfrey had put the case before her in its true light; but now, alas! it was too late. She had spoken words which

he could never forget. He did not forget them ; she saw this only too surely, or thought she did so. She watched him incessantly, weighed his words, appraised his looks ; was certain that he loved her less. He did not spend half so much time with her as he had once done ; what should she do if things grew worse ?

The time came to leave London, and they spent the late summer and early autumn in paying a series of visits. Lady Lucy had received other invitations, and as her thirst for rest was likely to be appeased elsewhere, she did not seem to regret Berkhamstead much, so Daylesford and his wife were free to make their own plans. He would not go to Berkhamstead, however, not even for a few days. He said that, if they did, Mrs. Scatcherd would be sure to infest the house all the time they were there, and that he would not go until he had persuaded some one to give her husband a good living. Zeph found matter for sadness in these words. She chose to consider that they implied a reproach to herself. Mrs. Scatcherd

found her a congenial companion, and Godfrey, no doubt, regarded them as much on a par. 'Perhaps we are!' thought Zeph; she was beginning to estimate herself very humbly.

Early in October they returned to London; Daylesford was going to pay a fortnight's visit to a bachelor friend in Scotland, and Zeph was for the first time to be left alone. The day of his departure was drawing very near, when he received a letter from Miss Everilda. It came when they were at breakfast, and after reading it he passed it across the table to Zeph without any comment. It was an invitation to Seaton Court. Miss Everilda said she knew that Daylesford was engaged to pay a visit in Scotland, but that if he came at once there was time for him to spend at least a week with her before he was due there, and that, as Zeph was not going to Scotland with him, she must make up her mind to give her poor old cousin the pleasure of her company during that time, and Daylesford could pick her up on his way home. That, as he thought, seemed an excellent plan,

but, unfortunately, Miss Everilda added, ‘I write to you, my dear cousin by marriage—an alliance, by the way, of which I am very proud—because, though I have written two letters already on the same subject to your sweet young wife, she has refused to accede to my wishes, and I want to interest you in my request. I very much want her to come. I want you even more. Your sister-in-law Mary has no grown-up brother of her own, and there are times in a girl’s life when this loss is much felt. A brother would be invaluable to my dear Mary now. I am with her, and I love her truly, but my love is perhaps not far-seeing, and no woman can judge of a man’s worth so acutely as a fellow-man can do. This being the case, do come. I am not at liberty to write more openly. It would not be seemly to anticipate what may be coming ; but if nothing is coming, no harm will be done by your giving me the great pleasure of seeing you and your wife here, and surely it would be pleasanter by far for her to be here, with her own affectionate relatives,

than in London, when you are not there with her. By-the-bye, I do think you ought both of you to come, if only to see Mary in the lovely fancy dress your good taste has provided her with. Zeph will have told you about the ball I have been persuaded to give. It is to take place on the 12th, just when you would both be here. I did think of giving it earlier, but had to postpone it till the county magnates returned from the sea-side.' Daylesford had watched Zeph's face while she read this rigma-  
role, and could easily see that she was feeling annoyed by something more than the wild confusion of its style.

'She does enjoy a mystery!' exclaimed Zeph, impatiently.

'But you seem to have been enjoying a mystery too!' observed Daylesford, drily. 'Your cousin says that she has already asked us twice, and that you have each time refused. You never told me that we had been invited.'

'Because—I am afraid it was because I did not want to go,' replied Zeph, blushing.



‘Not want to go! But why, dear?’

‘Oh, for a great many reasons; and I don’t think you would like to stay in Miss Everilda’s house, you would be bored to death by her absurdities.’

‘But she is so anxious we should go, and she asks you to stay there while I am in Scotland. That would be much pleasanter than staying here. Did she propose that before, or is it a new idea?’

‘It is new; but I don’t want to go at all, Godfrey.’

‘You need not stay quite so long. Seaton Court is near Alnminster. Seeing that cathedral would atone for a great deal of boredom.’

‘I don’t want to see it, I am sure,’ said Zeph; and then she would have liked to recall her words, for he would consider them another proof of her uneducated want of interest.

‘But don’t you want to see Polly again? You have not been with her for months; and don’t you see that we are both omitting to take into account the real reason why your cousin

is so anxious we should go? Polly has got a lover! Your cousin is afraid of the responsibility of letting an engagement take place under her roof without——’

‘But you surely do not want to take the responsibility upon yourself?’ exclaimed Zeph.

‘I don’t understand you, Zeph dear,’ he replied, fixing his honest kindly eyes on this perplexing wife of his.

‘Dear Godfrey, that is not my fault. I have been trying to make you understand that I would rather not go. Please do not let us think of it.’

‘But won’t she say that it is unkind if we don’t? and, by-the-bye, is it not unkind—to Polly I mean, even more than to your cousin?’

Zeph shook her head. ‘No, not unkind at all; we could do nothing either to help her engagement or to hinder it, whatever we thought, and we shall not be considered unkind if we give a good reason for our refusal.’

‘But what reason would be a good one in answer to such a letter as that?’ he asked, wondering more and more.

‘Let us think a little,’ said Zeph, hoping that she had persuaded him.

‘Have you any idea who this gentleman is?’ he asked. ‘I don’t want you to tell me Polly’s secret, if they are secrets, but I suppose she has told you all about him.’

Zeph blushed so painfully that he was sorry for her; but he could not imagine why she should do so. ‘She has never said anything to me—never given me the least hint that anything was going on.’

Just as Zeph said this, and mercifully as it happened, for it helped to screen her, a note was brought from Agnes. Miss Everilda had invited her to go to Seaton Court with the Daylesfords if they went, and to stay there for some time, and Agnes, who had not been from home for more than a year, and then only for a week to Berkhamstead when Zeph was married, was full of delight. She would be

there for the ball,—she would enjoy many other pleasures as yet unknown to her.

‘What is it?’ asked Daylesford, perceiving that Zeph was not pleased by what she was reading.

‘Oh, she has asked Agnes to go with us, and Agnes is very much delighted.’

‘Another reason for our going,’ said Daylesford. ‘It would be cruel to disappoint her.’

Zeph went to the window. If Godfrey persisted in urging her thus she would have to speak of something that she did not even like to think about. It was cruel of him to try to make her do what he must see she disliked so much. He would not have done that six months ago, when he loved her, and this thought made her very unhappy.

At this moment Agnes came in. She had followed her own note very quickly. ‘You have got my note? You know that Miss Everilda wants me to go to Seaton Court with you?’ she asked, her eyes dancing with pleasure.

‘Yes, but I don’t think we are going—at least I don’t want to go,’ replied Zeph.

‘That is what I was so afraid of,’ said Agnes, sadly; ‘I thought you might perhaps not quite like to go.’

‘Not quite like to go,’ thought Daylesford; ‘why should she not?’ It was manifest that, whatever the reason might be, Agnes was well acquainted with it.

‘I do so want you to accept,’ pleaded Agnes; ‘I have never been anywhere or seen anything, but I’m not to go unless you do.’

Zeph made some answer which did not amount to much, and looked at Daylesford. He would have liked to know more about this, but, being a gentleman, and seeing that the two girls were not able to talk as freely as they wished in his presence, he made some excuse and left them alone.

‘Why should my wife dislike paying this visit?’ He asked himself this question again and again. When he went home he found that Agnes had completely changed her mind

and no longer wished to go to Seaton Court, and that the two girls had, subject to his consent, arranged to pass the fortnight which he was to spend in Scotland, together; Agnes was to come and stay with her sister. He could not but believe that his wife had persuaded the poor girl to sacrifice her wishes.

‘What do you say to our plan, Godfrey?’ asked Agnes.

‘I do not know what to say. I think Zeph ought to go. I am afraid, if not, Polly will think her unkind.’

‘Polly think her unkind!’ exclaimed the indiscreet Agnes; ‘Polly is not the one who wants Zeph to go. I don’t suppose she even knows that Miss Everilda has written to ask her. Polly would have stopped her if she had. She would——’

Zeph was looking much distressed. Agnes caught sight of her face and checked herself suddenly.

‘Why should Polly stop her?’ asked Daylesford, rather indignant with the expression.

‘Because she would be perfectly sure that Zeph would not want to go there!’

‘I am afraid I don’t quite understand,’ said Godfrey.

‘I mean it is so dull there,’ said Agnes, who had not Zeph’s straightforward determination to tell the truth at any cost.

Dull, when so short a time before Agnes had been longing to go because of the many pleasures she would enjoy! Zeph looked distressed; nothing would have induced her to make such a false excuse. Daylesford, of course, noticed the discrepancy between Agnes’s present and past views, but he felt sure that, when he and Zeph were alone together, she would give the explanation which now seemed to be really needed. But Zeph made no attempt to explain anything, and Daylesford felt aggrieved. She looked at him as if she would like to say something. He gave her openings and opportunities to do it; she never availed herself of any of them, and he grew more and more dissatisfied and estranged from her.

‘If you don’t want to go to Seaton Court you shall not go, but I think I shall for a day or two,’ said he.

‘Thank you, Godfrey,’ she replied, and he did not know whether she was thanking him for sparing her a trial or for being ready to undergo one himself. Zeph was very subdued in her manner nowadays, for she was perpetually tormented by the consciousness that she had forfeited much of her husband’s love. She watched for signs of this, and made herself miserable when, as was often the case, she thought she found them, and he in his turn was watching her just as narrowly. He could not fail to observe that her manner to him was much changed; it was anxious and deferential; and he often saw her looking at him with eyes full of sadness. ‘What is it, Zeph? You are not quite happy about something,’ he sometimes said.

‘It is nothing,’ she always replied, for she was afraid it was but natural that he should love her less after what had occurred, and



ashamed to complain that he left her alone so much more. Men were not expected to devote almost their whole time to their wives; she knew that. He had been very good when they first came home, and all was new and strange to her; then he had always been at hand. She could not expect that kind of thing to go on for ever. Nevertheless it made a great difference.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

‘ I HAVE A VERY PARTICULAR REASON.’

This sounds as bad as truth.—SHELLEY.

DAYLESFORD did not go to Seaton Court until his return from Scotland, but that did not prevent his receiving a warm welcome from Miss Everilda.

‘ Where is Polly ? ’ he asked, soon after his arrival.

‘ She is doing something for me ; you will see her directly, poor dear.’

‘ Is anything amiss with her ? ’ asked Daylesford.

‘ No ; yes. My dear Mr. Daylesford, our house is full of excitement just now—a great deal that is interesting is going on in it. I don’t know when I have enjoyed anything more ! I asked you here to give your opinion

of one lover, and now we have actually two coming ; at least one of them has given up coming, and that's what makes it so interesting.'

'Two !' said Daylesford in some confusion, as was not unnatural, considering the vagueness of the information she gave him.

'Yes, two ; at least I suppose I may say two, for I am sure that Mr. Cuthbert is in love with Mary, for he is always coming to see her ; and Mr. Simonds won't come, so he must have a very strong feeling for her too.'

'I don't quite see that,' said Daylesford.

'Oh, yes, I do ; he was always here till he got vexed and jealous ; and he would not have got jealous if he had not been in love, now would he?—and isn't it interesting?'

'I wish you would explain a little,' said Daylesford.

'I will—I want to do so. I will put the situation perfectly before you. Our first lover was Mr. Simonds, one of the masters at the Alnminster School, and he used to come here very often before the ball. Lover number two

made his first appearance at that ball. He is a rich young squire in the neighbourhood. Mr. Simonds, you know, perhaps, does not dance much, and is not much at home at balls or entertainments of that kind, and Mr. Cuthbert is quite different, and appears to great advantage in society. I told dear Mary at the time that she was dancing far too much with Mr. Cuthbert, and letting him make her too conspicuous; but she said she could not help it, for there was no keeping him away from her, and that he asked her for nearly every dance. Mr. Simonds saw this, and began to look very black and indignant, and finally he went away and walked on the terrace outside in the moonlight. Wasn't it deliciously like a novel? I did so enjoy it! Then Mr. Cuthbert called next day, and came back the day afterwards on some excuse, and Mr. Simonds was here then, and saw him, and was vexed by his attentions to Mary, and perhaps with her manner to him, and left abruptly, and now he will not come at all. He has refused all my

invitations for the last fortnight, so now I have resolved to let him have his own way and stay at home if he likes, for in every respect Mr. Cuthbert is a better match for my Mary, and he lives only three miles off, so I should see her whenever I liked, and have her at hand to help me with my banking books.'

'But which of the two does she like best?'

'I don't know. She ought to prefer Mr. Cuthbert, for John Simonds has behaved in a very stupid, ill-tempered way. I feel quite offended, for I have been very kind to him, and now he refuses all my invitations.'

'Don't distress yourself about it—leave it to time.'

'It does not distress me, except for Mary's sake. So far as I am concerned, nothing could have happened better. It is a mine of study and inspiration to me. Stop, as we are alone, I really do think I might read you one or two of the things I have written lately. I owe every one of them to this, and they are by far the best things I have ever done.'

‘But ought I not to see Polly?’ said he, in much trepidation. ‘You said that she was at home.’

‘Yes; she is in the breakfast-room with Mr. Cuthbert,’ replied Miss Everilda. ‘She went to add up my savings’ bank accounts for me, and he said he would not mind helping her—John Simonds used to help her before. She does not know that you are here. They are very difficult to balance, and I told Thomas on no account to interrupt her.’

‘Then perhaps we ought not to interrupt her,’ said Daylesford.

‘Perhaps not. I want you to see Mr. Cuthbert; but there is no need to be in a hurry about that, for he is going to dine here; I asked him when he came.’

‘Tell me all about him, as his case seems the most pressing,’ said Daylesford. ‘I am very anxious about Polly’s happiness.’

‘It won’t be secured by letting her marry that ill-tempered Mr. Simonds—Mr. Cuthbert is worth twenty of him! I think, if you will

let me read a poem I wrote about Mr. Cuthbert yesterday, you will get a better idea of him than I could ever give you in plain prose.'

'Oh, no ; as it is a matter of business, do tell me in plain prose,' said Daylesford, in great alarm ; 'I think it will be better for me, I really do.'

'I will try. I will do my best to set him before you. His father was a sporting squire of good family, and he died when this George Cuthbert was a boy. He has two sisters, who are well married and living in the county, and he is rich, and young, and rather good-looking. He does not care for poetry, I fear ; but if he marries Mary we must try to get him to like it. At present I am sorry to say he always falls asleep if I read anything long to him, especially if it is my own composition ; but when he marries my dear little cousin, no doubt he will feel more interest. He has a large estate and a charming house about three miles off. He has just returned from America, that is why he and Mary have not met before.'

‘It sounds well. Is there no drawback?’

‘Some people might think it a drawback that he is a widower; but I don’t.’

‘That depends,’ said Daylesford, oracularly. ‘And now tell me something about Mr. Simonds.’

‘I have not patience to speak of him. It is rude to refuse my invitations, but he shall have no more till this is settled. His father is a doctor in London; but there is no need to tell you about him, for the Simondses and the Trehermes have always been friends, and you must have heard all about them from your wife. You shake your head; well, they played together as children, and ran in and out of each other’s houses and called each other by their Christian names. Mr. Simonds is always saying Polly when he speaks to Mary now; and then he checks himself; and I daresay it would be the same with Zeph. However, he is not so good a match as Mr. Cuthbert, so I am very glad he has given up coming. I am very anxious Mary should choose wisely.’



‘What is wisely?’

‘Ah! that remains to be proved; if she marry the one she loves best, all will be right.’

Miss Everilda had said that Mr. Cuthbert was a young man, so Daylesford was considerably surprised when a gentleman of thirty-nine or forty walked into the drawing-room. The poor lady knew that he was a little younger than she herself was, and every one who was younger than herself was young in her eyes, for she measured her age by her feelings, and they were as youthful as ever.

Polly was unfeignedly glad to see Daylesford, and the glow of pleasure which brightened her face at once was sufficient for some time to hide all other feelings. After a while, however, he could see that her words lagged, that her manner was anxious and constrained, and that she sometimes returned very short answers to Mr. Cuthbert’s polite speeches. He seemed to be full of plans for Daylesford’s amusement and pleasure. He invited them all

to go next day to see one of the show places of the county, an old manor-house and abbey standing in a beautiful little estate of which he was the owner. It was ten miles off, and the weather was beginning to be cold for a long drive, Miss Everilda said, but yet Mr. Daylesford ought to see this; or would he like to make sure of seeing Alnminster first? Polly's eyes seemed to show some anxiety as to his decision; he saw that she was hoping he would pronounce in favour of Alnminster, but, before he could do so, Miss Everilda exclaimed, 'Oh no, we will go to Alnminster another day; there is no fear of bad weather; it is never wet when I want to go anywhere.'

'Yes, please go to Aislaby to-morrow. I want you to do that first,' said Mr. Cuthbert. 'How shall we go? You might take Mr. Daylesford in the brougham, and then I would drive Miss Treherne in my mail-phaeton.'

Polly cast such an imploring glance at Daylesford that he came to her rescue at once and said, 'Oh, no, let us go together; we could

go in an open carriage if the ladies took a good supply of wraps.'

So it was settled, and later in the evening Polly thanked Daylesford for what he had done for her. 'I did not want to drive all the way to Aislaby alone with him. Miss Everilda is the one who likes him, not I. I should have had to do it though, had it not been for you.'

'You must always give me a hint when I can do anything for you,' said Daylesford, who had a great regard for Polly.

'May I? Then will you do something else? Mr. Cuthbert will want you to put off going to Alminster till Friday, but I wish you would say that you must go to-morrow. I have a particular reason for this—a very particular reason.'

'All right,' said Daylesford, 'I will. You don't much care for Mr. Cuthbert, I think?'

'No, not very much, though he is kind,' she answered. She looked as if she would like to say more, but dared not, and almost immediately afterwards Miss Everilda, who had left

them alone for a minute or two while she made some arrangements for next day's expedition, returned. 'Dear Mary,' she said affectionately, 'you don't seem quite yourself to-night; are you tired? I have not heard your pretty laugh all the evening.'

Mary returned no answer, so Daylesford looked up quickly to see why, and caught sight of something glistening in the girl's eyes; they had filled with sudden tears: a word or two of kindness had been too much for her. She turned away to examine a card on the mantel-piece and answered as lightly as she could, but from that moment his heart was enlisted in her cause. He would not leave that house until he had done all he could to make her happy.

The drive to Aislaby was enjoyable enough, and it was a most beautiful place, even at that chilly period of the year.

'Keep with me, please, Godfrey,' Polly had whispered when they alighted from the carriage, so he never left her. He felt that Mr. Cuthbert was regarding him as a stupid creature who

was determined to stay where he was not wanted, and was continually looking at him with a very discontented eye; but he obeyed Polly and never strayed from her side. They walked through the park and soon came to a lovely river side path between tall trees and cliffs. The trees were magnificent, and even at that late period of the year they were still covered with leaves; some were even green, others were russet or scarlet, and many a bright gold one was even now fluttering down to the feet of the passers-by. Some fell lingeringly into the impetuous little brown stream which was hurrying so fast onwards to meet the strong river, in which ere long its existence would be merged. How it dashed the bright leaves against the rocks which thwarted its progress! —how it whirled them through the rapids between these barriers! One leaf might be traced far on its way. Sometimes it seemed to have found a resting-place as part of a golden girdle round some rock, and then some invisible current began to dislodge it, and point

by point it lost its place in the bright band, and slipped back into the whirl of the water.

‘Poor little leaves!’ said Polly to Daylesford, ‘they don’t want to leave this place. I should not want to leave it either, if I lived here.’

‘There is a very good house,’ said Mr. Cuthbert, who had approached unperceived, much to Polly’s discomfiture. ‘It is just round the corner.’

‘Who lives in it?’ asked Miss Everilda.

‘Only a housekeeper. It is a sweet place, but somehow I have always preferred Thornaby. The kennels are there, you see. We will go and look at the house.’

It was a pretty old house, not large, but comfortable.

‘Come in,’ said Mr. Cuthbert, ‘there are some pictures; I want to show you one.’

They went and saw the pictures, and the gardens, and the ruins, and then returned to the house to luncheon; Mr. Cuthbert trying

all the time to detach Polly from the rigorous guardianship of her brother-in-law.

‘You must let me escort you to Alnminster,’ said Mr. Cuthbert when they reached home. ‘We must all go. Shall we go on Friday?’

Daylesford remembered his promise to Polly, and said he must go on Thursday; and then he learnt why she had made him do so, for Mr. Cuthbert at once said he had an engagement on Thursday and could not go.

‘It must be Thursday, I fear,’ replied Daylesford, ‘for on Friday I return to London.’

‘Thank you for what you have done for me to-day,’ said Polly, when Mr. Cuthbert, who had stayed to dinner, had at last gone home.

‘And what can I do for you to-morrow?’ asked Daylesford.

Polly blushed crimson. ‘Nothing that I know of,’ said she; ‘but I will ask you if I do think of anything.’

‘Is that a bargain?’ he said.

‘It is, a faithful one, and it is my interest to keep to it.’

They set off to Alnminster about ten.

‘I mean to devote myself entirely to showing you the beauties of the place. I shall not enter a single house, or waste a minute in speaking to any one,’ said Miss Everilda.

‘Unless it is some one who is very agreeable,’ said Daylesford.

‘Oh, no, not even then.’

Of course, as soon as they reached the Cathedral Close, Miss Everilda darted off to one of the canons’ houses to inquire after some invalid friend, and Daylesford and Polly were told to make their way into the cathedral and get a verger to show them round. Miss Everilda did not mind missing that part of the day, as she knew every word he would say to them. When they came to the door leading out of the cloisters, however, they were kept back by a man with a wand. Service was not quite over; it was a Saint’s day, and that made it rather longer. There was a good deal to look at, and they did not object to waiting. Suddenly a whole band of white-surpliced



King's Scholars streamed forth, and presently Daylesford saw Polly shaking hands with a handsome man in a surplice who looked very glad to see her. He had little difficulty in guessing this to be John Simonds, and strolled away to examine the roof of the cloisters and leave them the opportunity of saying a word or two in peace. In a short time she came to him with her newly-found companion. She did not introduce him to Daylesford, but said, 'We ought to go inside and find a verger, or Miss Everilda will think that I am not doing my duty by her guest.'

'You need not have a verger, if you will allow me to be your guide,' said Mr. Simonds. 'I have nothing to do now till school begins again at two o'clock, so I am entirely at your service. Wait one moment, please, till I get rid of this surplice.'

He soon rejoined them, and they all went inside the building together, and still she did not introduce the two gentlemen to each other. Daylesford heartily liked the new-comer; he

liked his honest, manly way of speaking, and handsome kindly face. 'He is worth a dozen Cuthberts,' thought he, 'and I am glad Polly knows it.' Polly evidently did know it; she had become a different being.

'You have not been to see us for a whole fortnight,' she said to John, when she was sure the reconciliation was so firmly established that she could risk an allusion to the past.

'Don't remind me. Do you think I don't know, and feel it? Will Miss Everilda let me go back with you, and stay to dinner this evening, or shall you all be too tired?'

'We shall not be tired at all,' replied Polly, who could now have walked all day without knowing that there was such a thing as fatigue. Daylesford thoroughly enjoyed the hour spent in the cathedral, for Mr. Simonds made all they saw interesting. It was a whole hour before Miss Everilda returned. At last she came.

'Oh, Mr. Simonds!' she exclaimed, 'you here?' She was surprised, and never concealed her feelings.

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I had the great good fortune to meet Miss Polly at the door. It is a Saint’s day, you know, so I am here.’

‘You might have—but no, I will forgive you,’ said Miss Everilda, magnanimously. ‘But you really have been long in coming to see us.’

‘It has seemed longer to me than to you,’ murmured John; and then he said, ‘I have just been wondering whether I might go back with you to-day and spend the evening. I could walk home.’

‘We shall be delighted. Do come.’

‘You won’t go till after four?’ said he; ‘I am not free till then.’

‘Oh, no, my cousin has never been here before, and there is a great deal to show him. Come, Mr. Daylesford, we must be moving.’

Daylesford was speaking to Polly. John started and said, ‘Mr. Daylesford! Is that the name of your friend?’

‘Yes. Have you not been introduced? Mary, how thoughtless of you not to introduce Mr. Daylesford to Mr. Simonds! Mr. Simonds,

Mr. Daylesford. You know who Mr. Daylesford is, of course. I am proud to say that he is a relative of mine, for he has married my beautiful niece Josephine Treherne. You remember her, of course, in your young days, Mr. Simonds; was she not a sweet creature?’

Polly looked dismayed. Miss Everilda would have run on still further if Daylesford, who saw that something had occurred that was extremely displeasing to John, had not come up and silenced her for the moment by attracting her attention to a bit of fine carving.

John had turned pale. Polly came to him as soon as Miss Everilda had gone away with Daylesford, and at once she said, ‘John, forgive me; I purposely refrained from introducing you; I knew his name would distress you.’

‘Oh, no, it does not distress me,’ he answered, recovering himself. ‘It is not that—it was only the first shock—that’s all.’

‘You would like him if you knew him,’ said she.

‘Now that, perhaps, is going a little bit too far—at least for the present. I daresay he is extremely pleasant, but I don’t wish to be acquainted with him. I shall not come out to Seaton Court to-day. What excuse shall I make?’

‘Go away now, and say nothing about going back with us, and then send a note to say that you cannot. But I am afraid Miss Everilda will be offended again.’

‘What are you two plotting?’ inquired luckless Miss Everilda. ‘Come, Mr. Daylesford, we must be going. Oh, Mr. Simonds, do tell Mr. Daylesford the story about that mark on the tomb there.’

‘I am extremely sorry,’ replied John, ‘but I am afraid I must leave you or Miss Polly to tell that, for I shall have to hurry away—I have an engagement at home now.’

‘Indeed?’ said Miss Everilda, incredulously. Even she, though she lived in a poetical haze, could see that he was leaving them because, for some reason or other, he did not want to stay.

Daylesford saw it too, and could not but remember that an hour ago he had said that he had no engagement till two o'clock.

'I really must go,' said John.

'Well, good-bye, then,' said Miss Everilda; 'we shall meet again at four.'

He bowed so as to include the whole party, and hurried away without looking at Daylesford, who could not fail to perceive that he himself was the mark of this man's dislike.

'What can be the matter with him now?' said poor perplexed Miss Everilda; 'that young man is much too ill-tempered to have the management of boys. Don't you agree with me, Polly?'

Polly hung her head and seemed to decline to think at all. They walked about the town and saw the castle and all the fine views, and at last it was time to go home.

'But where is Mr. Simonds?' inquired Miss Everilda.

'I don't believe he will come,' thought Daylesford; and he was right, for a note came

instead to say that a duty had unexpectedly been thrust on him which would detain him the whole of that day, but that he would take an early opportunity of calling at Seaton Court. Miss Everilda threw his note on the floor and said that his conduct was unpardonable. Daylesford looked at Polly, who did not seem either surprised or distressed.

‘You knew that he would not come,’ said Daylesford in a low voice some ten minutes later, while Miss Everilda was jotting down a fine thought.

Polly made no answer—she could not deny it. He could say no more, for the carriage was ready, and they set out on their way home. Little was said during the five-miles drive. Miss Everilda had a bad headache, and Polly was tired. She was not unhappy—Daylesford could see that; in fact she was infinitely happier than when she left home in the morning. He resolved to ask her for an explanation of Mr. Simonds’s strange manner before he returned to London. Chance favoured him,

but not until late in the evening, when Miss Everilda, whose headache had grown worse, retired to her own room.

‘Now, Polly,’ said Daylesford, ‘as we are at last alone, do help me to understand some things which are puzzling me.’

Polly looked very uneasy.

‘Don’t mind talking plainly to me, dear Polly,’ said he; ‘I am your brother, and I want to be a good one. You may always come to me in full confidence that I will do my best to serve you.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Polly, ‘I am sure you would. I trust you entirely. Miss Everilda is kindness itself, but she takes such odd fancies, and such sudden ones too.’

‘I can imagine it. Polly, do explain why Mr. Simonds’s manner changed so when he heard my name.’

Polly looked much embarrassed, but at last said, ‘I thought you would know that—that Zeph would have told you herself. Poor fellow, he was very much attached to her.’



Daylesford was full of astonishment at his own stupidity ; he saw the whole situation in a moment, and wondered why he had not seen it at a glance. Of course that was the reason, and that was why Zeph had refused to come to Seaton Court. She had known that she should meet Mr. Simonds if she did. 'I might have known,' thought he ; 'of course I might have known.'

'But when he is so obviously cured of his attachment to your sister,' began Daylesford—Polly blushing all the while like any rose, for she could not but see what he meant—'he might surely be able to endure my presence without showing so many signs of dislike. It is not as if she had refused or deserted him for my sake.' Polly hung her head. 'He is a very good fellow,' continued Daylesford, cheerily, 'and very much in love with you.'

Poor doubting Polly looked up in a moment, 'Do you really think so, Godfrey?' she asked eagerly. 'He has behaved very strangely to me lately.'

‘That’s nothing. I am certain he is in love with you, and if his conduct has been strange, it is because he has been jealous of your Mr. Cuthbert—that’s all.’

‘Perhaps it is; and, after all, if he was angry about him it was natural enough; he thought he was going to be treated in the same way again.’

Daylesford started; her words fell on him like a heavy blow. Had Zeph jilted this man for the sake of one who was richer—for himself? Polly’s words could bear no other interpretation. And he had never known it!

This explained everything. Not only did it account for Mr. Simonds’s jealousy of Mr. Cuthbert and indignation when he thought he saw Polly going the same way as her sister, but it also explained Zeph’s extreme reluctance to pay this visit; and, alas! it also explained her coldness to himself. He had often thought her cold—often longed for some sign of her love, and now the reason why she never gave him any such sign was evident. She felt no parti-

cular affection for him—she had married him for his wealth and position ; she felt a certain amount of kindness and much gratitude to him, but her heart was given to another.

Daylesford was sitting in a dark corner by the fire, or Polly, preoccupied though she was with her own feelings, must have observed the change that had come over him. ‘Godfrey,’ said she timidly, ‘you are sure you think that he cares for me?’

Daylesford started. ‘I do. I am sure he does,’ he said.

‘Then if Miss Everilda talks to you about him—she is sure to do so, I think—please make her understand that it is wrong of her to encourage Mr. Cuthbert so much, for I don’t care for him. I don’t want him to come here, and she is always asking him, and she won’t ask John.’

‘You had better tell her a little about Mr Simonds’s past history,’ said Daylesford, making a great effort to be calm and reasonable for Polly’s sake ; ‘about his affection for Zeph, I

mean. You see, as she is ignorant of that, she naturally misjudges him. Tell her, and she will understand his behaviour ; it is quite natural under the circumstances.'

'Quite,' replied Polly, emphatically, and her answer was another anguish to him.

He must cut this short—he could not bear it ; it was even a strain on his honour. He was so tempted to ask Polly when this affair with Simonds had happened, and if it had been during the latter part of the time when he himself had known his wife as Zeph Treherne. He feared that it was so—he was almost certain of it. He longed for complete certainty either one way or the other. Polly could give it to him, and doubtless would do so, but he must not ask her. He must seek for no explanation except from Zeph.

'I want to write a letter,' said he ; 'I had better do it at once. Be happy, Polly ; I will speak to Miss Everilda ; she will listen to me, and all will be right, I am sure. I like your

Mr. Simonds, and shall be very glad to welcome him as a brother-in-law.'

Polly had not expected so much warmth from him. 'Thank you,' said she, 'if ever such a thing does come to pass, we must all try to be happy about it. I don't see why not. Zeph and he will be able to meet without minding it, some day. Good-night.' She left him, but he never wrote that letter, and it was not a good night to him.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

‘IT IS A BAD BUSINESS.’

*Theseus.* Say what abridgment have you for this evening?  
 What mask? What musick? How shall we beguile  
 The lazy time if not with some delight?

*Midsummer Night's Dream.*

And cold hard words have we to deal with now.

R. BROWNING.

‘POOR ZEPH!’ said Daylesford to himself, as he crossed the hall to find her on his return to London, ‘Poor Zeph, it is a bad business!’ He had thought about it all through the long cold journey home. She had married him without loving him—everything proved it—a thousand words and looks and deeds—trifles in themselves, but a heavy weight of evidence when taken in combination with what Polly had so unwittingly let fall the night before—all confirmed the cruel fact. She had perhaps ex-

pected that love would grow up of its own accord after marriage, but alas, she had, week by week, cared for him less. That is what he thought all day long as he was making his way to her over the frost-bitten marshes and meadow lands through which the train hurried him so fast. There was little enough to be done now, he feared, beyond trying to make the best of things.

He entered the room in a very softened state of mind. Agnes was sitting by his wife's side. He had not expected that Agnes would be there. The sight of her reminded him of the day when their visit to Seaton Court was under discussion. He hated the memory of it, and he greeted both the girls much more coldly than he was aware of.

'How is Polly?' asked Agnes.

'And Miss Everilda?' added Zeph, and there their interest ceased. He supposed that they both felt it was safer not to ask questions. And yet Zeph knew from Miss Everilda's letter that some man was on the point of asking her

sister Polly in marriage—it was odd that she did not want to hear something about him. She had professed entire ignorance on the subject when her cousin's letter came; but she could not have been so ignorant as she pretended—she must have known it was John Simonds, or she would surely show some curiosity now. Agnes, too, had been tutored, and was equally silent. He began to dislike Agnes. He looked round the room—it was full of material warmth and comfort—what other warmth or comfort was there? None! It was contrary to his nature to let himself be condemned to pass through life in this dreary, half-hearted way without making some effort to regain peace of mind, and even happiness. He rapidly decided that he would speak plainly to Zeph. He would tell her all he knew, and thought, and feared, and ask for explanation where explanation was needed. Surely by means of honesty and forbearance, they might arrive at some agreement which would enable them to dwell somewhere on the borderland of



happiness, if they could not penetrate farther. But what a difficult task it would be to speak to her! He would have to ask if she, his wedded wife, had loved another man when she went through the ceremony of marriage with himself, and if she still preferred that man to him?

How could he say such a thing? How could they continue to live together if she owned that it was true? And yet better say it now than have it on his mind as long as life lasted—besides, was it right to have it on his mind without giving her an opportunity of defending herself? Yes, he would speak to her, and soon. This constraint was intolerable to him.

She was looking at him all this time and trying to read his thoughts, but he did not know it. How changed he seemed to be! How different in his manner! She had been afraid that he might be cold to her, and though anxious to see him again, had half-dreaded

return on that account ; for she was firmly convinced that she had for ever lost his affection. He had despised her ever since that day when she had owned that she should like him to assume the Berkhamstead title. She often wondered how she could have done so, for in her heart she admired him for his firmness in refusing it, but one or two worldly women had temporarily influenced her for evil, and in one of her many moments of jealousy of his brother she had given vent to the fruit of their counsels. She knew that he could never love her after that.

His coldness and silence were oppressive ; and what right had he to be so unforgiving ? He had never reproached her for what she had said. She would have liked him much better if he had. She began to feel very bitter against him. Before he came, her mind had been filled with pleasure at the thought of seeing him again. Now he was with her, and he could only make disjointed remarks about the weather, or the fire, or the dog—she was

so chilled that she could but answer his cold speeches in their own tone.

He was mentally swearing at Agnes. What a nuisance her presence was! He could not forget that after being in such a state of delight at the prospect of going to Seaton Court because of its gaiety, she had suddenly declared that she did not want to go because it would be so dull. Polly was worth a hundred of Agnes, and, he was almost afraid, of Zeph too.

How lovely Zeph looked in the soft lamp-light—he dared not trust himself to look at her—her love was none of his, and any appearance of it had been a delusion. And yet his eyes were drawn to her in spite of himself; how sad she was beginning to look! If that odious Agnes were but away! How could Zeph have been so thoughtless as not to know that he would like to be alone with her? He and Zeph had never been separated before; he had now been absent for three weeks, and yet on his return he had to sit and talk

of indifferent matters because that girl was there.

Zeph's heart, meanwhile, was hardening more and more—how silent—how stiff—how terribly unkind Godfrey was now; and she, poor foolish girl that she was, had been rejoicing all day because she should so soon see him! What was the use of seeing him? What was the use of having him back, if he were always going to look as absent and indifferent to her as he did now? What a wretchedly dull evening it was going to be if it were all like this! She found herself wishing he had stayed away a little longer. Agnes and she had enjoyed their evenings hitherto—there was always the theatre, if they had no other engagement.

‘Godfrey,’ said she, yielding to an uncontrollable feeling of pique, and being for the moment careless whether she wounded him or not, ‘you know that you have come a day before we expected you?’

‘Oh yes,’ he replied, ‘I told you I should

stay away till Saturday, but Polly asked me to do something for her—to go to Alnminster on Thursday instead of Friday, that was all—but in order to have a presentable excuse for doing it I had to come home a day earlier. She did not know that, of course, and I did not think it would make any difference in your arrangements. I telegraphed this morning. You got my telegram?’

‘Oh yes, I got your telegram—it made no difference. We have an engagement for this evening; you won’t object to being left alone a little, I am sure; indeed perhaps you will prefer it, for you don’t seem inclined to talk?’

‘What kind of an engagement? What do you mean, dear?’

‘I mean a very ordinary sort of engagement, an engagement to an “at home” Mrs. Corrie asked us to some time ago.’

‘Well, you are not bound to go to a thing of that kind unless you like.’

‘But we do like. We both enjoy going out very much, and have a great horror of

being always at home. We have been out every evening since you went away.'

'Then I am sure you will not mind spending this evening here now that I have come back.'

'But you might like to go yourself?'

'I? Oh no, and I don't want you to go either.'

Zeph looked as if she wanted to press the point, but he said, 'Stay at home to-night if you please, I particularly wish it.'

'Of course we will stay if you wish it,' said Zeph. But why should he wish it? she thought him ill-tempered and disagreeable.

He was paying very little attention to anything that passed, but was earnestly thinking how to find some way of living happily with her, the woman whom he loved above all others. He would speak to her solemnly and lovingly, and he would do it at once. He had the greatest faith in absolute openness.

Dinner came, and dinner at last was ended—it had seemed long, and weighed down by

perpetual restraint. Zeph and Agnes went away together, and Daylesford said he would smoke a cigarette and soon follow them. He did smoke a cigarette, but he did not follow them immediately. He could have no opportunity of speaking to Zeph until that sister of hers was gone to bed; so he sat thinking how to begin the conversation, and how best to say what was so disagreeable to say and to hear. Time passed unawares, he seemed to himself to have sat twenty minutes or so, when he looked at the clock on the mantelpiece and found that it was nearly eleven. He rose rather wearily; he had slept little the night before, and his journey had tired him. The time had come to speak to her, but he made his way to the drawing-room with no alacrity. He detested his errand—he loved his wife in spite of everything, and he felt that he was going to torture her.

The drawing-room was empty; Zeph and her sister had gone to bed, then. He went upstairs; the door of Zeph's room was open,

and some one was moving about inside. It was her maid. 'I was just folding up some of Mrs. Daylesford's things, sir,' said she, 'but I have done.'

'Where is your mistress?' said he.

'Didn't Charles tell you, sir? It is very wrong if he didn't, for I distinctly heard Mrs. Daylesford leave a message with him. He was to tell you that she and Miss Agnes Treherne had gone to Mrs. Corrie's, but that they did not intend to stay late.'

'Gone to Mrs. Corrie's!' repeated Daylesford, who had never felt more astounded in his life.

Mrs. Lawley, the maid, fixed a critical eye on him—he perceived it, and recovered himself in a moment. 'I had forgotten,' said he, 'when once I had decided not to go myself, I thought no more about it.'

He went downstairs to wait for them. The lamps were already extinguished. He relighted one, and drew a chair to the fire. He wanted no light—he was not going to do anything.



He could not have believed that his wife would disregard his request and go out. Had she intended to do so even while she seemed to be renouncing the pleasure she coveted? It must surely have been a sudden thought. Perhaps that sister of hers had made her go; but how could Zeph leave the house without a word?

He sat for two hours, growing more and more angry. 'They must come soon, now,' he thought, but it was after one o'clock before he heard the muffled sounds which betokened their arrival. He did not move from his chair—he felt that Zeph's conduct was outrageous. When a minute or two had gone by, the servant must have told her that his master was still in the drawing-room, for she came in quickly, with the air of a person who had for the last three or four hours been so fêted, flattered, and caressed by those with whom her time had been spent, that all such trifles as had occupied her mind before she left home were completely driven out of it. She advanced to

her husband's side with a step in which a trace of dancing lingered—her hair lay carelessly about her temples as if it had been blown there while she was whirling round in the dance—her manner was light and buoyant. Where was the heavy-hearted woman whom he had sat with such a short while before?

‘You sitting up, Godfrey?’ said she, ‘I am so sorry! You got my message, I hope?’ Her tone was as careless as her manner. She did not seem the least ashamed of what she had done—he felt more and more indignant.

‘When I went up to bed I heard what you had done, but not till then,’ said he, ‘and I must say that I think you ought not to have gone out when I so specially requested you to stay at home.’

‘It was a sudden thought. We fully intended to stay at home, I assure you; I said we would when you asked us to do so before dinner—but after dinner when you stayed away such an immense time, and seemed to care so very little for our society, we did

think that we might just as well be enjoying ourselves at Mrs. Corrie's, as sitting boring ourselves to death where we were—that was all.'

'Well, I think you behaved extremely ill to me, and I hope you will never do such a thing again!' observed Daylesford, haughtily.

Zeph was nettled by his tone, and there was another thing which irritated her. In order to excuse herself she had just been obliged to call back to her remembrance what had occurred before she left home, and the contempt for her society which he had shown by spending all the evening in the dining-room once more roused her anger.

'I should never have dreamed of going, if you had come and sat with us,' said she. 'Of course not: but I was alone with Agnes, and we both like going out much better than sitting alone; and besides——'

'Let us say no more about it, Zeph,' said he. 'Only never treat me so cavalierly again. You behaved in a way that was far from

courteous, and I think I have a right to expect courtesy from you, if——’ he checked himself, and did not complete that unpromising sentence.

Zeph was bewildered: the transition from a brilliant ball-room where she had been admired by all, to a dimly-lighted apartment with the presence of a man privileged to scold her, and disposed to avail himself of his privilege, struck her as singularly disagreeable. If Godfrey were going to be always like this, dull, unloving, and silent unless he had some fault to find with her, she had little enough to look forward to. ‘I will not do it again,’ she said coldly; ‘I should not have done it this time if you had behaved differently; and then I had Agnes to think of—you forget that! You are always thinking of what your brother will like—why should not I sometimes do the same by my sister?’

This was a most unfortunate speech—it reminded Daylesford of a day which he desired to forget for ever—the day when he and his

wife had had their only quarrel. It was cruelly unfortunate so far as Zeph was concerned, for she intended no revival of the attack she had then made—her feeling on that subject had entirely changed—she was only pointing her sentence. It embittered her husband terribly, and for some time it required all his self-control to make allowance for her—she was speaking in anger, he told himself at last—she did not mean it, he was sure.

‘I am very tired,’ said Zeph, ‘if you have nothing more to say I think I shall go to bed.’

It was late—he was very sorry for her, and yet now was the time to say all that was on his mind—he could not wait until another day. ‘I have more to say,’ he replied. ‘Do you think you can bear to sit up a little longer? It is very important that you and I should understand each other.’

‘Indeed it is, Godfrey,’ she said sadly, and tears rose to her eyes as she spoke. She had been standing all this time—he brought her a chair and would have liked to take her in his

arms and speak to her lovingly, heart by heart, for he pitied her so when she was subdued and gentle, and he loved her so at all times, but there was something so cold and strange and unloving about her—except at the rare moments when she showed feeling—that he dared not. After all, when she did show feeling it was only feeling for herself, or, at the most, gratitude to him for mere worldly benefits, and if he did show any love for her, ten to one but she would repel it. She had never loved him—she had scarcely even made any pretence of it, and when the truth which was going to be told was told, he would hear this from her own lips.

‘And now, Zeph,’ said he, ‘I want to know why you have never told me anything about Mr. John Simonds?’

Zeph sighed audibly. ‘Ought I to have done so?’ she asked very humbly.

‘I don’t know. I am not well-informed on the subject, and I have refrained from asking any questions except from yourself, but I

could not avoid hearing hints. If you had an offer of marriage from him, and all but, or quite accepted him within a few weeks of the time when you accepted me—perhaps even within a few days—I should say that there can be no doubt of its being your duty to name such a fact to me.'

'Not within a few days!' exclaimed Zeph, indignantly.

'Well, do you mind telling me a little about it? Will you tell me when something occurred which seems to have furnished him with a grievance against you, and makes you desirous to avoid seeing him? I don't wish to force you to talk about things that are disagreeable to you, but I must say I do not like the idea of my wife being, as it were, afraid to see any one.'

'I will tell you everything,' replied Zeph. She was very pale now, but she looked boldly in his face, and he gazed at her for a moment with affectionate admiration, for he felt assured that, cost her what it might, no word would pass her lips that was not absolutely true.

‘I think I would rather answer questions than tell you a long story; ask me anything you wish to know, and I will answer you,’ said she.

‘You are sure you don’t mind?’ said he, for he began to think he was pressing her very hardly.

‘I am sure I do mind, but as it has come to this, we must go on. Ask what you like—I will answer all your questions.’

‘Thank you. I won’t ask many. I understand Mr. Simonds was known to you and your family when you were a child; when did he first become attached to you?’

‘I don’t know,’ she answered quietly, but very sadly, ‘he loved me from the very first. He first offered to me when I was sixteen.’

‘And what did you do?’

‘Oh, I was a child, but he knew I liked him better than any one else; then he went away for three years.’

‘And when did he come back?’

‘The day after you and I first met.’



‘ And he renewed his offer ? ’

‘ Yes, he renewed his offer.’ Zeph spoke almost scornfully—John was not the kind of man to change his mind !

‘ And you ? You didn’t accept him ? ’

‘ No, I could not quite make up my mind.’

‘ Not after having had three years to think about it ? ’

‘ No, not even after having had three years,’ said she, bitterly. ‘ I asked him for a few days more.’

‘ Giving him hope ? ’

‘ Yes, giving him hope.’

‘ And then when the few days were over ? ’

‘ I asked for another week.’

‘ He could not think you were very anxious to accept him when you asked for so many delays,’ said Daylesford, who was beginning to think that Mr. John Simonds had been posing as a man with a grievance with very little cause.

But Zeph began to weep, and said, ‘ Oh yes, he must have expected me to accept him—

how could he help expecting it? I always led him to hope. Godfrey, don't judge me too severely; I could not bear to refuse him, and yet so many things made me feel that I could not be happy with him—I am not the kind of girl to make a poor man happy, and I knew it.'

'Was that your only reason for refusing him?' he asked. 'You loved him?'

She could not raise her eyes from the ground, but she would not deny the truth, and as soon as her voice would obey her, she said 'Yes.'

'You loved him and refused him?'

'I did it as much for his sake as my own. I should not have made him happy. Godfrey, you need say and think no more about John Simonds—in the way of pity, I mean; you have not told me, but I suppose Polly is going to marry him—that will be the end of it all—she will make him far happier than I could have done—she is worth fifty of me.'

To her great distress, Daylesford did not

gainsay her. He was silent for a while, and then said, 'I suppose Mr. Simonds had not the mastership when he spoke to you?'

'Yes, he had,' answered Zeph, who felt shame closing her in on every side.

'Then why did you not marry him, when you loved him? And how could you marry me? You never loved me, Zeph.'

Zeph, miserable girl that she was, longed to fall on her knees and say, 'I did not love you when I married you, I own it with shame, but I do love you now, so help me God, I do love you now!' These very words had already framed themselves in her mind—could she summon up courage to utter them? How hard it was to say anything at all when he looked so cold and stern. How doubly hard to say such a thing as that now, for his love was extinct! Before she had braced up her nerves to do it, he had made it impossible by saying, 'Poor Zeph, you have turned life into a very bitter thing for both of us! I have felt that there was something wrong about our

marriage from the very first, and now I suppose it must be wrong to the end !’

‘Oh no, no !’ exclaimed Zeph, making a great effort. ‘We must——’

‘What can we do that can alter the cruel fact? You never loved me—you loved another man! You would have married him if he had not been poor. What a curse money is! It sucks the honour out of every one and everything!’

Zeph was so stung by the contempt of his words and tone, and by seeing how completely his love had slipped away from her, that she sprang to her feet and passionately exclaimed, ‘Don’t blame me too much! You have no right to take this tone with me. After all, my conduct was not worse than your own! It was not so bad! I don’t think it was so bad by a thousand degrees! When you told me you loved me you were actually living with a woman whom you must have said you loved, or, I think, bad as she was, she would not have been here!’

‘You are partly mistaken,’ said Daylesford, as soon as he recovered the shock of finding that she knew this,—‘My conduct was bad, but not quite so bad as you think. I struggled against my love for you, and avoided you for a long time because I wanted to be faithful to her. When I offered to you she had left my house for some time, and though I took steps to find out where she was, I did not succeed in doing so until it was too late.’

‘Do you regret that?’ enquired Zeph, bitterly.

‘Don’t ask me,’ said he, sadly, ‘at all events she loved me.’

‘Horrible creature!’ exclaimed Zeph, with great repugnance, ‘I cannot bear to hear of her! It makes me miserable to think of your having lived in that way—it always has made me miserable!’

‘I will not allow you to call her names,’ said Daylesford, warmly. ‘She was a noble, good woman; God bless her, always! She lived with me because she loved me, poor girl

—you lived with me without loving me; she dispensed with the sacrament of marriage—you profaned it! You seem to think that there is no wickedness in profaning it, and a great deal in dispensing with it altogether. I do not agree with you—both courses are wrong, but I know which I consider the worst. You came to my home pretending to feel a wife's love for me, while all your love was given to another man—your life was a lie—it was a thousand times—nay a million times more wicked than anything poor Hester ever did! She is a noble woman, and I sincerely wish I had never——'

'Don't say it!' interrupted Zeph, in an agony of distress, 'I entreat you not to say that you wish you had never parted from her. This is terrible! Godfrey, I will try to be more what you wish—don't make me feel your scorn too much.'

'We must both try to be different, Zeph,' said he, earnestly. 'Our lives have to be passed together, even though love be absent.'

She raised her aching eyes to his, and pain-

fully endeavoured to learn the meaning of his words. Did he mean that love for her was now, and for ever would be, absent from his heart? Alas for her if it were so, for she could never be indifferent to its loss! She could read nothing, and dared to ask nothing. What was she that she should venture to make such enquiries? How could she hope for such a good gift? She never must hope for it—his words of scorn still rang in her ears, and would ring for ever.

‘I will go now,’ said she, hopelessly and wearily; and before he could answer her, she had risen to her feet, gathered up the train of her long white ball-dress, and, without daring to look at Daylesford, had quietly left the room. And he watched her go, paralysed by what had occurred between them—his heart seemed turned to stone. All that he could do was to watch her go, repeating to himself the while the self-same words which had been in his mind as he went through the hall on his way to find her on his return home that very afternoon. ‘Poor Zeph! It is a bad business!’

He sat until the grey light of morning began to steal into the room, and then from very weariness he fell asleep. He awoke with a clear recollection of all that had occurred to make him unhappy, and with a consciousness that the day would have to be lived through somehow. Zeph did not come down to breakfast, and he did not go to her room.

‘She seems to be unusually tired after the dance!’ said Agnes; ‘I begin to think that it is almost a pity we went. Godfrey,’ she added, ‘Zeph says she wishes you would let her go to Eastbourne, or Bournemouth, or somewhere, for a week or two with me. She does not like to ask you herself, I think, and said she wished I would, for a change of air will do her good.’

‘Perhaps it will,’ said he. ‘Of course she shall go, if she likes.’

He was very glad that she had proposed this—when she returned they would be able to begin their lives afresh, and some day perhaps——, but he could not finish that thought.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

## THE STUDIO.

Worse and worse ; doubts and incredulities,  
They make me mad.—MIDDLETON'S *Witches*.

DAYLESFORD was not a man to yield to misery without making an effort to escape from it ; but what was he to do ? It was in vain to hope for any change in Zeph, it was in vain to hope for anything but the blessing of work. Work would dull the pain of his wounds, and enable him to feel that there was still something to live for. But what could he do ? He could never have a profession—it was too late. He could not go into Parliament as he would have liked—family circumstances were an effectual barrier to that. He was all but seven-and-twenty, and had a title which he knew he had no right to assume, estates which

were not his to enjoy, a brother whom he loved and never could see, and a wife—ah! that was the bitterest of all—a wife who did not love him! It seemed a dreary thing to be so young and strong and full of vigour, and to know that the days of a man's life were three-score and ten, and that so many of his own were yet to come. Half of the years he had passed had been years of youth and semi-unconsciousness, all that were to follow would be full of sorrow and regret, until at last the sleep of Death would bring rest and peace. How was the time which lay before him to be passed by one who had such a miserably poor equipment to help him to pass it happily? He had loved his brother so much that while they remained together he had never cared to have any other friend. Since they had been separated, Daylesford had made some friends, but none with whom he was thoroughly intimate. He must work and live on alone. But how was he to work—how was a man who could never enter into any profession to find

work in which he could steep himself so completely that the tormenting thoughts which were always presenting themselves would discover few moments when they could be freely entertained? He did not torment himself about Zeph alone, conscience began to be busy, and he remembered how he had treated Hester Langdale. His life was now bare of love. Who could have loved him more truly and unselfishly than she? He had done a cruel wrong to her, and now he was reaping his just reward. His punishment was an exceedingly bitter one, but he owned that it was his due.

Perhaps it was the memory of Hester Langdale which, after a while, made his thoughts revert to the mornings which had been so happy and so fully occupied when he worked by her side at his drawings. She had always encouraged him to cultivate his talent, and had assured him that all he wanted was perseverance. He had usually given up when he got into any difficulty, and she had always

told him that that was just the time to go on. He had a strong love of art ; perhaps if he began to work at it again it might prove a solace. He gathered together his materials and began to paint in earnest. That is, he tried to do so, for he could not get on, something was amiss, something was always wanting. It was Hester's never-failing encouragement which was wanting ; he recognised that at last, and then the doubt assailed him—perhaps in her pity and kindness she had encouraged him far beyond his deserts—possibly he had no talent whatsoever.

He took his poor faulty attempts to an artist friend and said, ‘ Tell me what to do. Is my work hopelessly bad, or is it worth while to go on ? ’

‘ Of course you must go on ; there is a great deal of merit in your work, but you want knowledge, your drawing is imperfect ; you want training, you ought to draw the figure. Get a good model, and learn to draw the figure—that is, if you must draw, though why

you who have plenty of money should want to enter into all the worry and misery of an artist's life, Heaven only knows !' Daylesford knew, so he hired a big studio, and rather enjoyed furnishing it artistically, and providing himself with casts and everything else he seemed to think he required. What sumptuous provision he did make, and what magnificent works have been produced at the cost of a few shillings ! He was glad he had thought of this occupation ; it gave a slight zest to an existence which was otherwise devoid of all interest. He prevailed on a very good artist to superintend his labours a little, and as he himself gave the whole of his time to drawing, he soon began to make progress.

Two months passed, Zeph was still at Bournemouth. Once he went down there to see her. He did not work so well for some days after this, it stirred up many a sorrow which had been partly dulled by hard labour. He wrote to her. She wrote him dutiful letters telling him what she and Agnes said and

did, and sometimes these letters were almost affectionate. 'Poor child, she is trying to fulfil her vows,' thought Daylesford, 'but nothing will make her love me,' and he buried himself in work again. At last she came home, and Agnes repaired to Lorne Gardens. He was very glad when Zeph came back, though she, who was now never at ease in his presence, doubted and feared lest hers should only trouble him. He had told her about his studio in his letters, but she had not understood from them how large a part it now played in the scheme of his life.

'You never come home to luncheon, now,' she said one evening.

'No,' replied Daylesford, 'I have no time to come. Besides, I can get as much as I want at the studio.'

'You seem to be very tired to-night,' she said kindly.

'Yes, I stand the whole day. I do wonder how those professional men can do it so easily.'

'How do you know that they do it easily?'

‘They must. I see some of them about in the evenings at different places, and they are all men who are working hard during the day. I could not do it; I get quite enough standing during the day without having to stand about in people’s hot rooms half the night.’

‘But you will have to go out; you cannot shut yourself up altogether.’

‘I don’t mind dining out, for one must dine somewhere, but I will not go to the miserable things that people are pleased to call “receptions.”’

He saw that she looked disappointed, and added, ‘Of course I don’t want to condemn you to seclusion, for the sake of my poor attempts at painting; when you really want me very much to go anywhere with you, I will—and you can go out alone sometimes, can’t you?’

This was kind enough as far as intention went, but the first time she put him to the test—unnecessarily, perhaps on an occasion when she could easily have gone alone—he showed

much reluctance. She never asked him to go out to evening-parties again, but she had so little pleasure or happiness in her own home that she could not forego the chance of finding a little out of it, and she went constantly. He did not seem to object. She often wished he would object; anything would have been better than this passive indifference. She believed that she might say or do what she chose, provided she abstained from saying anything against his brother, did not worry him to go to some evening party when he had already dined out and wanted to go home, and did not intrude on him in his studio.

That studio seemed to be a perfect delight to him. He went to it directly after breakfast. He never returned till dinner, and was not infrequently late for that. If she asked him where he had been all day, he said, 'You know, dear; at the studio.'

'Have you never left it?' she sometimes asked.

'No; I don't want to leave it,' he replied.



‘Don’t you want exercise?’

‘I get quite enough of that in walking backwards and forwards to the studio.’

The studio—the studio—she could not help thinking that he repeated the word oftener than was needful, on purpose. She hated the very name of it.

‘Do you never want to see any one? You must tire of being alone.’

‘I am working so hard that I have no time to remember that there is any one whom I could want to see. You don’t know what an engrossing thing work is!’

Unhappily for her, she did; he had already taught her. She detested work. Here was Godfrey enjoying life merely because he could stand all day long at his painting, and enjoying it so much that he never seemed to think how very unhappily they were living together—it never appeared to make the least difference to him that they should live as they did, only exchanging a few careless words when they met, and meeting so seldom tha

they might, in reality, be said to be almost living apart. For some months, now, their life had been on this wise. He had come home so tired that he never seemed able to enter into any conversation. If she spoke he answered her, of course, but only with half his mind, and, as she thought, in a duty manner. (Thus did she often interpret his constraint.) She had soon taken offence at this, and had henceforth said as little as possible. They had dined in comparative silence, and then Zeph had gone away to some evening party—sometimes with a friend, more frequently alone—and Daylesford, weary with his long day's work, had fallen asleep in his chair and gone to bed long before his wife's return. Once or twice it had happened that the husband who had some piece of work on hand in which he was specially interested, had got up unusually early to go off to his studio to get on with it, and had, as he went down, fresh from a long night's rest, met on the stairs his young wife, looking as people do look after a night's dancing. The

morning sun streamed in on her pale face, and he could not help mentally comparing her appearance with that of the faded and crumpled flowers which he saw hanging about the front of her dress. 'Zeph!' he had exclaimed, in a tone of mild remonstrance and wonder, but she had fancied she detected a good deal of ill-suppressed contempt in it—'you are just coming home as I am going out!'

She had answered briefly, with downcast eyes, and had glided past him as quickly as she could, hiding her torn dress, turning away her pale face, and trying to hide her shame that he should see her at such a time. It was his own fault—she often told herself so. It was very certain that she would not have cared to live this life of perpetual gaiety, if he had cared to have her at home with him. He had made her what she was—a creature who lived only for dress and society. That studio was the misery of her life! It took him away from her. It made him happy when he was away from her—it was the one thing for which he lived.

It was only a mile and a half off—he had never asked her to go and see it.

‘What is your studio like?’ she said one day. She was pining to see it.

‘Oh, it is just like any other studio,’ he answered carelessly. ‘They are all very much alike.’

‘Describe it a little,’ she said, hoping that he would find it easier to ask her to go and see it for herself.

But no! He replied at once, ‘It is hung with some rather fine tapestry, and there are one or two good bits of old furniture, but there is nothing particular to describe.’

‘I should like to see it, Godfrey,’ she said, making a great effort. ‘Could I?’

‘Of course you could; I had no idea that you would be interested in it; but I should like to show it to you, if you care to see it.’

‘Then I will go with you to-morrow, or perhaps drop in later.’

‘Oh, you must not do that. You must go at a fixed time, for Skirrow is painting there

with me just now ; we are both working from the same model.'

'But I should not stay long, I know that time is valuable, I would scarcely interrupt him at all.'

'You couldn't go when he was really at work,' said Daylesford, decidedly ; he knew a great deal more about artists' ways than Zeph did ; 'I will arrange a time when you can come.'

Zeph said no more. She could not conceive why he and Mr. Skirrow should mind being interrupted for five minutes or so. That was quite as long as she should have cared to stay. She would just have gone in and looked round and gone away again. In fact, all that she had wished to ascertain was whether Daylesford objected to her going or not. She said no more. It was evident that he did. She had a dread which she hardly admitted to herself—a terrible haunting dread. Hester Langdale had been an artist. She and Godfrey had always painted together before, they were perhaps painting together now ! This fear had

been in her mind for some time—it was rapidly becoming a certainty. She grew pale and thin, and could neither eat nor sleep. Daylesford's studio was in Somerset Place, Chelsea. Zeph knew that, but did not know the number. 'What is the number of your house in Chelsea?' she said, one day—she would not use the obnoxious word, studio—she tried to speak as carelessly as she could.

'I am sure I don't know, dear,' said he, with real carelessness—hers, alas, had been a very poor imitation of it. Her jealousy flamed up at once; he must know the number of his own studio! Why did he not wish to tell it to her?

'Has any one ever used it to paint in before?' she asked, for her woman's wit had suggested something to her.

'Oh dear yes!' he replied. 'Skirrow had it last year, that is how I got to know of it.'

'Oh,' said Zeph, and her remark did not appear to be very connected, but she said no more. As soon as he was gone she began to

search for old catalogues of the Royal Academy, to see if that address was given as Mr. Skirrow's, and at once had the satisfaction of finding 'Skirrow, Peter Charles, 17 Somerset Place, Chelsea, S.W.'

So far so good, but perhaps Mr. Skirrow was not there quite so much as Godfrey seemed to wish her to believe. Perhaps there were days when he never went near the place. Hester Langdale could paint too—Daylesford no longer loved his wife—that scheming woman might have found out where he was, and have used her opportunity, and be trying to win him back again.

That very day Zeph found some excuse for driving twice through Somerset Place. No. 17 consisted only of a room or two. One of them was a very large one, with a great overgrown window which ran up into the roof, and there were two or three dwelling-rooms besides. It was not a house which possessed any graces of construction, it meant work and business, the red brick of its walls made it look cheerful, but

Zeph gazed on it as the grave of all her hopes. She dared not enter. She did not know who did enter. She must not linger in the street. She had already, perhaps, aroused her coachman's suspicions by requiring him to drive through the street slowly. It was not a street to linger in for the sake of enjoying the pleasures of sight. Small houses made up one side of it, with the studio breaking in on their symmetry, and small houses and small shops repeated themselves on the other. And yet Zeph had not seen half so much of this street as she wanted. Next morning, no sooner had Daylesford left the house than she dressed herself plainly, put on a thick veil, and walked down to Chelsea.

With much trepidation she suddenly found herself in Somerset Place, and was just in time to see a girl standing at the door of No. 17—a young girl dressed in olive-green.

Zeph's heart stood still. She felt that this was Hester Langdale—that which she had greatly feared had come upon her. The girl's



back was turned, Zeph could not see her face, but her figure was young, graceful, and tall, and she tripped lightly into the house as soon as the door was opened, as if her feet were familiar with the way. Zeph's feet failed her—her heart failed her still more, she caught hold of some palings and stood supporting herself by them. She must get home somehow.

‘Want a cab, miss?’ asked a hansom cabman, who had been watching her uncertain demeanour for some time. Zeph felt as if Heaven had still some kindness for her. She got home at last, crept upstairs, and locked herself in her own room to make herself miserable all the rest of the day. ‘I am not going downstairs, Lawley,’ said she in the evening. ‘I don't want any dinner, my head aches—it has ached all day.’

‘Will you have it served upstairs?’ suggested Lawley. ‘Mr. Daylesford is not coming back to dinner.’

Zeph shook her head—what Lawley had said did not stimulate her appetite. ‘How do

you know Mr. Daylesford is not coming back?' she asked.

'Some one has brought a message. I am not sure who it was. Shall I ask, ma'am?'

'No, don't ask. Why should you? it makes no difference; and don't bring any dinner here, I want none.'

Zeph was ill that day, but she was much more ill the next; however, nothing could keep her at home. This time she took a hansom all the way from her own door, and when she reached the studio she bade the man drive up and down Somerset Place until further orders. Then she thrust herself back into the corner as much out of sight as possible, and waited and watched. She saw no one, but presently began to be afraid that her husband would hear the sound of the hansom and look out. Cabs were not unknown in Somerset Place, but they were comparatively rare. She dismissed hers and began to walk. She passed the studio, and went to the end of the street. When she turned round she saw that the same

girl had approached from a side street and was now walking about fifty yards in front of her towards No. 17. She wore the same olive-green dress, and hat—Zeph recognised it in a moment, and pressed forward to overtake her. It was a cap rather than a hat which covered this girl's head—a cap like that worn by Raphael in his portrait of himself, and beneath it was a thick mass of crisp, wavy, bronze-red hair which sparkled in the sunlight. Zeph could not help looking at it, could not deny that it was beautiful, and that this creature whom she instinctively hated carried her head like a queen, and walked with an easy grace the like of which she herself had never yet seen. Zeph was gaining on her rapidly when she remembered that this girl would ring or knock at No. 17, and that it was quite within the bounds of possibility that Godfrey himself might open the door for her. She turned back at once, but looked round continually. She was soon glad that she had turned back, for who should appear from one of the houses

near but Dr. Simonds—John's father. She had never seen him since her marriage—how odd it was that she should see him here. What was still more odd was, that the olive-green girl, who was, as Zeph believed, none other than Hester Langdale, was acquainted with him too. With much show of surprise at thus meeting him, she stopped and held out her hand. The doctor seemed pleased to see her; they talked for a few minutes, and then she said something anxiously, which Zeph could easily interpret as a request to know the time, for the doctor pulled out his watch and showed it to her, on which, with the quick movements of one who knows that she is too late for an appointment, she sprang up the steps, and stood there exchanging last words with the doctor until the door was opened. She was admitted without a moment's hesitation.

Zeph was so astounded that she entirely forgot that she ought not to let Dr. Simonds see her; but this lapse of memory cost her little. He came quickly towards her; she was

still standing by the window of an oil-shop, pretending to be struck by some of its unattractive contents, when the doctor walked past her without so much as being aware that any one was there. This danger being over, Zeph ventured to look once more at No. 17. It was to be her last look, for she was now going home; she had seen enough—God help her—and must get home. Her husband was just coming out, and his face was set towards her.

She darted into the oil-shop. ‘I want—I want—’ said she—‘Oh, a box of matches.’ She was thankful for this happy thought. But while the shopman was getting her some matches of a superior and lady-like make, Daylesford appeared in the doorway, which was surrounded by dangling festoons of blacking-brushes, and began to try to pierce his way inside. Zeph hastily retreated behind a huge tower near the end of the shop built of bundles of firewood. This effectually concealed her, but her heart was beating so violently that she was forced to sit down on

an unopened cask of cranberries. If Godfrey came round the fortification behind which she had retreated she was for ever undone.

‘I have just discovered that I am out of turpentine, can you let me have some?’ said he. What a dear voice it was!

‘Turps,’ said the master of the shop with a majestic wave of the hand to an underling; he himself preferred to wait on the beautiful young lady who was the first comer.

‘I had rather not have the very commonest kind,’ said Daylesford. ‘Have you a better kind? Can I see it?’

Zeph trembled in every limb, for he seemed to be moving towards her, but he came no nearer, and soon he had taken his turpentine and was gone. He was gone, but she dared not leave the shop for some minutes. She paid for her matches, and began to speak to a child who was sitting on the floor in a corner with a cat in her arms. The child made no response to Zeph’s advances. ‘I wouldn’t take

much notice of her, Miss,' said the father, 'she is not altogether well. She's sickening for something—that's why she's so cross.'

'What is it?' asked Zeph, in much alarm.

'Oh we hope it's nothing worse than the measles, but she's very red.'

Zeph thought it wise to go, and was soon out of the shop. She glanced uneasily up the street. Daylesford had disappeared—he was once more within those hateful brick walls, and she must go home. She set out at once, bemoaning the futility of her morning's work. Never again would she haunt Somerset Place! What had she gained by doing it now? A sight that had made her wretched, and an opportunity of sowing the seeds of some illness.

Daylesford came home late.

'You are late!' exclaimed Zeph, with some severity.

'I am afraid I am. I have been in a difficulty with my work. I cannot get on half so well when Skirrow does not come.'

‘Doesn’t he always come?’ said Zeph, eagerly. ‘Has he not been there to-day?’

‘No, nor yesterday either. When he is busy at home with work that is important, he very often does stay away.’

Zeph had been sure of it before, and yet now that she heard it from his own lips it seemed to overwhelm her.

‘You look ill, dear,’ said he, with much concern; ‘I hope——’

‘Never mind me,’ replied Zeph, coldly. ‘It is nothing! I don’t wish you to think of me.’

He looked at her with eyes full of pain and wonder. She saw it and hastened to add, ‘I am not ill—it is the heat’ Then after a pause she added, ‘Does any one ever come to the studio besides Mr. Skirrow? Any visitors I mean?’

‘No, never,’ he replied. ‘Never by any chance.’

He had denied it. And yet that very day she had seen that girl arrayed in olive-green



entering the studio door with all the familiarity of long custom. She had never until now believed it possible that her husband could utter a falsehood.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## THE OLIVE-GREEN CAP.

Begone,  
 Leave me without reply, this is the last  
 Of all our meeting.—PHILASTER.

Hear me forswear his roof by night,  
 His bread and salt by day,  
 His talkings at the wood-fire hearth,  
 His greetings by the way.—E. BARRETT BROWNING.

‘I AM thinking of running over to Paris for a day or two to see the Salon,’ said Daylesford, one evening; ‘Skirrow wants me to study the pictures.’

‘Is he going too?’ enquired Zeph.

‘Skirrow? Oh no, not yet at least—he is too busy.’

Zeph’s heart filled with uneasiness in a moment. ‘Am I to go?’ she asked, with a lurking hope that he would say yes.

‘I think you had much better not; you do

not look equal to the exertion, and as I am not intending to stay more than four or five days, it would be all fatigue. Ask your sister to stay with you while you are alone, and be as quiet as you can.'

He meant, 'go to as few parties as possible,'—but he had no need to advise that—for the last three weeks or more Zeph had refused all invitations except such as he himself was willing to accept. As for being quiet in any other sense, how could she obey him? What did he imagine her to be made of? And why should he provide her with a companion now, she wondered; surely by this time she was accustomed to being alone? She spent most of her time in silence, thinking of these and other, and still more bitter grievances. Daylesford pitied her from the bottom of his heart, but he could say nothing to comfort her—she repelled all his advances.

He went to Paris, and Zeph went to Lorne Gardens to ask Agnes to come and stay with her while he was away.

‘My dear Zeph, you must be going to far too many parties, or you would not be so pale. If you don’t take care you will make yourself look quite ill and old,’ said Agnes.

‘I don’t care if I do,’ replied Zeph, ‘why should I?’

‘What do you mean?’ asked honest Agnes, amazed to hear such words from her sister. ‘Are you unhappy about anything?’

She looked so sincerely distressed that Zeph was recalled to her senses, and said, ‘Yes; I should have liked to go to Paris with Godfrey; I want some new dresses. I could have seen about them while he was looking at his tiresome old pictures; but he told me I looked ill, and must stay at home.’

Agnes was appeased. Zeph went to the study—she had seen very little of her father and mother of late, for she had been afraid of breaking down and telling them how utterly wretched she was. Mr. Treherne greeted her with his usual smile.

‘Do you ever wish you had me back with

you, father?' she asked, almost hoping that he would say, 'Yes, my child, I wish you would come home again.'

He kissed her, and said, 'I like to know that you are happy. And I have your dear mother to help me with my work—she never fails me.'

Mrs. Treherne, who had been sitting all the morning turning a pen round and round between her finger and thumb, and waiting till he gave her something to do, looked delighted, and said, 'Zeph, have you read the splendid review of your father's book in the *Times*? It has made us so happy! We have a great many things to make us happy just now, and you are one of them, dear.' Zeph cut her visit short,—not for worlds would she have darkened their lives with her heavy cares. Agnes and she went away together, but not to the perpetual gaiety which had been the joy of their existence the last time they were under the same roof. Now, Zeph would go nowhere, and sat moping from morning till night.

On the morning of the day when Daylesford was to return, a letter came from Miss Everilda announcing that Polly was engaged to John Simonds. Miss Everilda's letter was to Zeph, but Agnes had a letter of her own from Polly. It was brimming over with happiness. She and John loved each other truly, and were, as they fondly believed, entering on a life which was henceforth to be one of never-failing happiness. Agnes read Polly's letter, which, of course, did not cause her any surprise; then she looked to see how Zeph was taking the news brought by hers. She had let it fall on her lap, and was thinking of John, and how he had loved her once, and of what she had gained by being false to him. Her thoughts were very bitter; she had gained pure misery, and felt that she deserved it.

‘Zeph, dear,’ said Agnes, timidly, ‘you look very unhappy; do you mind his marrying Polly?’

‘I? Why should I?’ she replied in a harsh

voice; 'I certainly could not expect him to keep single for my sake!'

'You will get quite accustomed to the idea of his marrying her, in time,' pleaded Agnes.

'Agnes, you are wrong! I have no dislike to the idea now. I want him to be happy; I want dear Polly to be happy, too; why should every one be miserable?'

Agnes did not understand her. She was afraid that Zeph would never be reconciled to this marriage, and yet why should she mind about it now?

Agnes thoroughly misunderstood Zeph, whose entire heart was now given to her husband, and whose misery was solely caused by her belief that he not only hated and despised her, but had slipped back into his old bonds. That made her woe, and Polly's happiness seemed to add an edge to the sharpness of her own pain.

She was very silent and sad all day. Agnes watched her with quiet sympathy; she had always known that Zeph had once been very

much attached to John Simonds, but had never grasped the possibility of her going on caring for him after her marriage. She was afraid her poor sister had acted very wickedly in marrying; but if she had, she was certainly suffering for it now. No one could have been kinder than Agnes during all this long day, and though Zeph's anguish was caused by something very different from what Agnes suspected, her sympathy was soothing and grateful. Daylesford was to come home in the evening, Agnes wanted to have all signs of grief cleared away before he appeared.

This time he was pleased to see her there—this time her presence was a relief rather than a restraint. Zeph was upstairs when he came. Her mind had been so racked by anxiety ever since he went away, that night after night had passed and she had not closed her eyes, and now sheer weariness and the desire to hide her condition from her husband had made her lie down to take some rest before he returned.



‘Where is Zeph?’ said he, impatiently.

‘Upstairs, lying down,’ replied Agnes.

‘She is not ill, I hope?’ said Daylesford, in alarm.

‘No—well, yes, she is, rather. She does not seem able to sleep—she never gets any rest. I persuaded her to lie down a while this afternoon.’

He looked so much grieved that Agnes hastened to add, ‘She will be all right when she comes downstairs again. A little sleep was all that was wanted to cure her; but she won’t like not to be told of your return. I’ll go to her room very quietly, and see if she is awake, and tell her.’

‘Better give her a little more time to rest,’ said Daylesford, though he had a great wish to see her at once. ‘Is there any news? Has anything happened since I went away?’

‘Yes, great news! Polly is engaged to be married to Mr. Simonds! We only heard of it this morning. Not that there is any particular newness in the news, after all, for we have

known for a long time that this was very likely to happen.'

They had only heard of this engagement in the morning, and Zeph was ill now, or, if not ill, unable to meet his sight! She had been very strange of late, and he had borne her strangeness as patiently as he could, for she was evidently suffering. He had known only too well why she was suffering. She had discovered how much she loved this man, too late. That was what had troubled his married life, and now that the last touch had been put to her loss she had broken down. Agnes stole away to see if her sister were asleep or awake, but in a very few minutes she came running back, screaming, 'Godfrey, Godfrey, come quickly! Zeph is very ill; she is lying on the floor by her bedside, and looks so dreadful! Come at once!'

There was no need to urge him to haste, he was upstairs almost immediately, and found his dear young wife lying on the floor in her room, and looking as if she would never rise again. All colour had faded from her lips and face,

and she was entirely unconscious. He took her in his arms and laid her on the bed, but it was some time before she opened her eyes again. When she did, they fell on Agnes's kind, anxious face. Daylesford was standing just behind her, but when Zeph saw him, she averted her eyes with every sign of dislike, and said, in a low voice, 'Make him go away, Agnes! Unless you wish to kill me, make Godfrey leave the room.'

'Zeph darling,' said Daylesford, who was quite overcome by her illness and by this unexpected treatment, 'don't drive me away! I love you so, and am so anxious about you—I want to stay with you.'

'Oh no, no, you do not love me,' said Zeph, faintly, 'go away! I cannot bear to see you! I want to go somewhere where I can get quite away from you!' She looked as if she were going to faint again.

'My dear Zeph,' began Daylesford; but Agnes, who had her own ideas as to Zeph's illness, went to him and led him away, saying:

‘Go now, she will soon be herself again. Let her have her way now.’

Before they had reached the door he heard Zeph say, ‘Thank you, Agnes dear, but don’t you leave me, or I shall have no one—I am all but alone in the world—I have no husband.’

‘Dear Zeph,’ said he, returning, but she insisted on his going away without another word. Daylesford feared that her mind was affected, and sent a messenger to hurry the doctor still more, or, if he could not come, bring another; but when the doctor did come, he said he could discover no symptoms of insanity in his patient, only great depression of spirits and feebleness of pulse.

‘Surely there is something more than depression,’ whispered Agnes to Daylesford; ‘she was almost violent when she declared that she did not want to live with you, and drove you away.’

But the doctor was firm. ‘So far as I can judge,’ said he, ‘she is in perfect possession of

her senses—she is feeble from sleeplessness and want of food—you say she has had very little of either of late, and she seems to have something on her mind. She must be humoured and kept very quiet, these things are most critical—her mind has received a shock.’

On this Daylesford and Agnes looked at each other with a glance that betokened intelligence; then Agnes repented of a glance which seemed to admit a fact against her sister, and said, ‘She will be quite well again when she has had a night’s rest, I hope.’

Daylesford went away and sat for hours buried in thought—that letter had done it—but she had been more or less unhappy long before the letter came.

Agnes sat all night by her sister’s bedside. Zeph slept quietly when she did sleep; when she was awake she seemed utterly miserable, yet she made no complaint. She never spoke voluntarily; but she did not seem to object to answering her sister’s questions. Seeing this, Agnes was at last emboldened to say, ‘Zeph,

has anything happened? What has made you like this? I know you had that letter, but why should you wish to leave Godfrey? Do tell me, dear, I am so unhappy about you.'

'Don't be unhappy—don't try to persuade me to stay with Godfrey—I cannot do it, I want you to go and tell him so! As soon as I am well enough to leave this house, I shall go. I shall try to find some quiet place far away from him and from every one.'

'But why? He is certain to ask me why, if I go to him.'

'Because I cannot live with him any longer,' replied Zeph, firmly.

'Don't you love him?' asked Agnes, and all Zeph's firmness was gone in a moment—she hid her face and wept.

She soon recovered herself, however, and said, 'It is no use to ask me whether I love him or not, I don't intend to live with him! Ask him to give me a little money—just enough for me to live on quietly somewhere; I shall be all alone—very little will do. And get him

to promise to leave me in peace—he must never come near me, and he must never write. I can go away—but the effort I make now is the last I must be called on to make.’

‘My poor dear Zeph,’ said Agnes, kissing her, ‘you would not talk that way if you were not ill!’

Zeph shook her head and said, ‘You don’t know. I wish you would speak to Godfrey—I shall not be well until I know that he will make no difficulty about my going——’

‘As if he would let you go away when he loves you so!’ replied Agnes.

‘Loves me so! You will drive me mad if you say such things,’ said Zeph, ‘I must know best! I know he will let me go, but I want to have it settled. It must be settled, for I tell you plainly I will stay here no longer, and if you refuse to go and see him about it, I will have a cab brought as soon as it is daylight, and will take lodgings somewhere. Go at once. Tell him if he wishes to show kindness and mercy, he will let me go without a word.’

Daylesford was in the library, his anxiety was much too great to allow him to think of taking any rest. Agnes went to him and gave a softened version of Zeph's words and wishes. He thought he possessed a key to what was so unintelligible to Agnes. She thought she possessed one to what must be so puzzling to him. Each thought, 'Poor Zeph, she has loved John Simonds very truly!'

'The doctor told us that she was to be humoured,' said he, 'and she shall be humoured, it is right that she should be. Soothe her; tell her I will consent to anything she likes, perhaps she will sleep if you do.'

'What! am I to say that she may go?' began Agnes.

'Oh no, don't say that, unless nothing else will satisfy her; say if she is anxious to be alone for a while, I will go. I will go back to Paris—I will go to my brother's—I will do anything, but I must beg her to stay in her home. Tell her I won't come back till she gives me leave. If that won't do, tell her she



may go ; tell her anything, promise anything to give her peace and rest, it will be time enough to talk of explanations when she is herself again.'

'How good you are, Godfrey!' exclaimed Agnes, warmly.

'Not good at all. I am so afraid that I have been unkind to her lately.'

'I am sure you have not,' said Agnes, and then she went to Zeph and told her that Godfrey was breaking his heart about her.

Zeph laughed her to scorn, and told her that she did not want to hear anything about him or what he felt except on one subject, and that was her own departure. Agnes repeated part of the conversation she had just had with him, but Zeph exclaimed, 'He shall not go, he shall not be driven out of this house! It is his! Everything is his. It is my place to go, and I will go.'

'Well, dear, he says you shall have your own way about everything ; but surely you will not go without some explanation ; how could

you leave your home and your husband in such a way? You had better let him go, he is quite willing to do it, and will not ask you to see him until you are well and able to talk to him about what is making you so unhappy. Would you rather he went and lived at the studio for a while? He could do that, he said, and then when you were well again you can see him and let him assure you of his love.'

Zeph had shuddered at the mention of the studio, but when Agnes began to talk of his giving assurances of his love, her anger re-kindled, and she interrupted her at once—'Be silent, Agnes, I don't want him to assure me of his love, he never shall. I will never see him again. I shall never be more able to talk to him about what is making me unhappy than I am now, and there is no need, for he must know. To-morrow I shall leave him and his house for ever!'

'How wicked to do such a thing as that when you have no reason!'

'I have a reason! Say no more about it,

you are making me very ill. You are making me talk of things which give me the greatest pain; you know I ought not to talk at all. Go to Godfrey, you are more his friend than mine—go to him. I will say no more but that I intend to leave him.’

Zeph looked so exhausted that Agnes was alarmed, and yet she could not prevail on her to lie down and be quiet. ‘I am not more his friend than yours, dear Zeph,’ said the poor tired girl; ‘I love you both; I will go now if you wish it, perhaps you will sleep if I do.’ But before Agnes had reached the door, Zeph said, ‘Stop a moment. I will write a line to him, and you shall take it with you.’

Agnes sat down feeling sick at heart. All night long she had done nothing but go backwards and forwards to Daylesford with cruel messages, and now Zeph was going to write something to him which would probably be crueller still. She watched her pen moving rapidly over the paper without one moment’s

indecision. How cold and hard and resolute she looked! The letter was soon written.

‘Read it,’ said Zeph, handing it to Agnes, and then she threw herself back on the sofa looking pale as ashes. Agnes read this:—  
‘Godfrey,—Thank you for yielding to my wishes. To-morrow morning early, I go to Bournemouth where I was before—if not, somewhere else. We must never meet again. We ought never to have married. I ask your pardon for having married you—you ought to do the same by me. We have been heavily punished—I much more heavily than you. I will read no letter from you. Don’t attempt to see me; I never will see you. I wish to leave you quietly, but for ever. You will be happier without me. I could not bear now to go on living with you—you must not say bitter things of me—you know why. I make no reproaches. May God forgive both of us! I am very miserable! I don’t attempt to conceal it, but some day, if you will but leave me in peace, I may come to myself again—here I

never could. Farewell! Do what you will—I shall never complain—only keep away from me.’

Long before Agnes had read to the end of this, she was crying. Zeph was now lying on the sofa pale as death, but calm. Agnes was awed by her attitude and expression, and dared utter no comment on what she had read. She stole quietly away to Daylesford. ‘Here,’ said she, ‘I am to give you this. It is a very cruel letter, but she is ill, you must not let it make you unhappy.’

He read it twice, and then wrote a line or two in answer. ‘My dearest wife, I love and pity you with all my heart. You are ill, and I feel that I have not been so kind to you as I ought to have been; but my love for you has never wavered, I have pitied you always, I pity you still more now. You want to be alone for a while, and perhaps you are right; but, dear Zeph, you must stay in your own home. Keep Agnes with you, and ask Miss Seaton to come to you. I am going to see my brother, and

when I return, we shall meet, I trust, as if all this trouble had never been.'

'And now, Agnes,' said he, after he had signed and sealed this, 'I must do some packing. When Zeph gets up, I shall be gone; give her this letter, and tell her that I have gone, and that she must stay here. She will soon be herself again; time will do for her what it has done for so many—at least, that is my hope. I shall stay a day or two in Paris for the sake of getting news of her. This is my address. You must write to me to-day by the afternoon post. I must know how she bears my departure, and what the doctor says. Write again to-morrow, and then, if your report is favourable, I shall continue my journey, if not I shall return at once. My absence will do her good, I think.'

'My dear Godfrey,' said Agnes, 'any one else would be angry—you are behaving like an angel.'

'An angel!' said he, 'if I had behaved—but we shall be happy yet.'

Agnes saw that he did not at all realise the strength of Zeph's anger, or of her resolution to leave him. She did not undeceive him. He went and packed his own portmanteau—a thing he had never done in his life before, and by seven o'clock he had left the house. Agnes had never been so grateful for anything as she was for having been wise enough to let him go with a heart full of hope. 'It was the first shock which made her behave so strangely,' he had said. 'Each day that goes by will make her calmer. If she is all right again before I get away from Paris—you must write and stop me going farther. I will come back the moment you say I may.'

'Then you think her mind really has been disturbed by a sudden shock?' Agnes had said.

'Yes, by Polly's letter, he had replied, for all disguise seemed useless. 'In a day or two you will see that she will care as little for this as she did when we were first married.'

Agnes feared that there was something on

Zeph's mind that was not likely to be dissipated in a few days, but she was thankful that he could hope.

‘ Good-bye, Agnes dear ; thank you for your kindness to me. You shall see what a good brother I will be to you when I come back. Don't forget to write to the “ Westminster ” both to-day and to-morrow.’

Those had been his last words, and now he was gone. She went upstairs to Zeph—she hoped to find her asleep. She heard a noise of some one moving about, and when she opened the door she saw that Zeph had been getting her clothes ready for her maid to pack. Her dresses were lying in one place, her mantles in another, and so on, all tidily arranged each according to its kind.

‘ It comforts me,’ said Zeph, apologetically—luxury had worked its will on her, and she had begun to be ashamed of doing anything for herself—‘ I feel much better when I am doing something to further my departure.’

‘ You need not think of that !’ said Agnes,



‘Godfrey has gone himself! He is on his way now to Santa Eulalia. Here is a note he has left for you.’

‘I don’t want it!’ said Zeph, resolutely. ‘Take it away, I will not read it!’

‘Zeph!’ exclaimed Agnes, ‘I have always looked up to you and tried hard to make myself as like you as I could—I never thought it possible that you could behave so ill. You have driven your husband away without a shadow of reason.’

Zeph did not speak. She sat down, and looked like one praying for strength to bear most cruel injustice. At last, and with a great effort, she said, ‘Perhaps if you understood things better you would speak differently. You think you understand everything, Agnes, but you don’t. Leave me alone, I want to be alone.’

‘Without a shadow of reason,’ she repeated, when the door had closed on her sister. ‘What would she say, or think, if she knew what reason I have?’ She must never know.

What would she say if she did? What would Godfrey say? Would he still give her assurances of his love? How dared he do so? Only yesterday she had received a convincing proof of his falseness.

The whole scene came back to her mind now with picture-like distinctness. She had been asleep for some time, but had suddenly awakened, and had found by her watch that her husband must be at home. She had got up in an instant—had smoothed her hair, and rejoiced to see that her sleep had brought a pretty colour into her pale cheeks, and had then hastened downstairs to see him whom she was foolish enough to love. What torture it was to remember all this now! Her way had led her past Godfrey's dressing-room—the door was open, and his man-servant was just taking his things out of a portmanteau lying open on the floor, as Zeph passed by. She saw him standing with something in his hand, which he was examining inside and out with an air of amused surprise. Zeph had seen what it was

at a glance. It was that olive-green cap—that self-same Raphael-like cap she had seen such a short while before. Here was proof, and absolutely overwhelming proof, of all she feared. Hester Langdale had been in Paris with him—there was no room for doubt. Zeph had gone back to her room. Everything had turned round before her eyes, and she had fallen senseless to the ground.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

‘HAVE YOUR WAY.’

Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband ?

*Romeo and Juliet.*

‘Is he really gone?’ enquired Zeph next day. ‘Are you quite sure that he is not living at the studio?’ She had been lying on the sofa most of the day, looking very sad and thoughtful, and Agnes had been hoping that she was feeling regret ; so she said at once, ‘Dear Zeph, you do love him ! I knew you would be sorry when he was really gone ; for he has gone.’

Zeph did not seem able to trust herself to make any reply to this tactless speech, and Agnes, who could not bear to see pain for which a remedy was so possible, foolishly hastened to add : ‘He is only going as far as Paris

for the present; he will stay there for a day or two, to be within reach of recall—and you will let me recall him, dear, and make us all happy?’

‘You have his address?’

‘Yes, I have his address. I’ll write at once, or will you write yourself—a few words from you would be worth pages from me.’

‘I thought you told me that Godfrey was going to Santa Eulalia,’ said Zeph, coldly.

‘So he is, if you persist in wishing him to keep away; but though you were not intended to know it, he is going to stay in Paris for a day or two to give you time to learn your true mind, and on the slightest hint of a change in you, he will come back and all will be well again.’

It was not in Zeph’s nature to reveal to Agnes her cause of complaint against her husband—she would spare her sister’s loving heart the pain of hearing of such falseness, and be loyal in her efforts to preserve Godfrey’s good name; but it was cruel of him to pretend to

such devotion when his heart was so alienated from her.

‘The sooner you put an end to this the better,’ said she. ‘It is absurd for him to wait on in Paris for any change in me! Give me a sheet of paper—I will write to him myself.’

She wrote unhesitatingly: ‘Agnes tells me that you are waiting in Paris, thinking that I may change my mind. Dismiss that idea for ever. I shall never change. I am now well, and able to form a calm opinion. My calm opinion is that we must part. I might make charges and utter reproaches, but as you yourself once pointed out, my own conduct is not free from blame. Make some arrangement by which I can live somewhere apart from you, and I will never trouble you again. Please accept this as final, for nothing can alter my decision. I return unopened the letter you left behind you.’ She addressed this with her own hand and sent it to the post, and then stole away to indulge in the agony of sorrow that was fast making its own of her.

‘Never mention his name to me again,’ she said to Agnes when they next met. Agnes obeyed, but she could see that day after day, from early morning till late night, Zeph’s mind was filled with the thought of him.

In due course a letter came from Daylesford. At first Zeph was not inclined to open it. ‘I have told him that I will read no letter from him, and I detest reading hypocritical professions of love!’ said she.

‘How can you call them hypocritical?’ began Agnes. Zeph interrupted her and bade her be silent.

‘You must read this,’ resumed Agnes; ‘you asked him to make arrangements for your separation, and no doubt he has done so—you ought to know what they are.’

Zeph coloured painfully, and her eyes filled with tears. ‘Ah yes,’ said she, ‘I ought to know, but I shall be glad when it is over.’ She spoke calmly, but Agnes believed it cost her a great effort to do so, and that in her heart she loved him and longed to recall him.

When Zeph opened the letter she read as follows ; ‘ I have done all that a man can do, and have borne more than any man ought to bear. Have your way—we will never meet again. I am going to my brother, and then much farther. I shall not return to England for years. There is nothing to bring me back—I do not wish to come back—your perverse and utterly unreasonable conduct shows me that we can never be happy together. You are right—it is wiser to part. I make no further opposition to your wish—in fact, it is my own. I shall be obliged to you if you will continue to reside where you are ; I have asked Miss Seaton to come to you ; my lawyer will give you any help he can. G. D.’

That was all. She had her way, and thus without a word of regret or kindness he acceded to her desire to part—nay, more, he said it was his own. Every tie between them was now severed but her dependence on his bounty. She would have to receive from him once or twice a year a sum of money which would



enable her to go on being miserable. Zeph could have shrieked aloud, her misery was so great and unexpected. She had not thought it possible that he would shake her off for ever so readily. She could not bear to let Agnes see how overwhelming this shock was—and yet she had no one to turn to for pity and help but Agnes.

‘Agnes, Agnes,’ said she, hoarsely, ‘you have had a letter from him, too, perhaps? If you have, let me see yours—it may not be quite so cruel as this.’

‘I had rather not show it,’ pleaded Agnes, and then Zeph realised that it was worse than her own; he had spoken more openly to Agnes, and had said all the bitter unloving things that had long been stored up in his mind. Agnes watched Zeph with alarm; she tried to soothe her, but Zeph soon called pride to her assistance and affected to be pleased to know that he was gone. And now, day by day, Agnes was more anxious and unhappy, for Zeph was growing so unmistakably ill.

Meantime Polly came home. She was to be married as soon as the holidays began, and came to spend some time with her family. To Agnes's surprise, Zeph had no difficulty in meeting her, and took much more interest in her marriage than she did in anything else.

'How ill she looks!' said Polly.

Agnes shook her head. But if they thought that Zeph was mourning the loss of John Simonds and had quarrelled with Daylesford for his sake, they were wrong. She had no love in her heart for any one but her husband—no feeling of any kind but perpetual grief for the loss of his affection. Her coldness during the last year had driven him back to Hester. Hester was probably with him now wherever he was, and happy; he had learnt her value and would never part from her again. Zeph did not know where he was—she knew nothing of him. He might be at Santa Eulalia, or he might be in Paris—he despised and disliked, and was glad to be rid of her, and had gone out of her life for ever.

Agnes knew no more than Zeph—no one did know anything, unless it were Mr. Blackmore the lawyer. He had called once, but Zeph had been too ill to see him—now she wished that she had made an effort—perhaps she would have heard some trifling fact concerning her husband. Mr. Blackmore had seen Agnes and had left a cheque for present expenses, which to Agnes's inexperienced eye represented at least a year's income, but would in reality perhaps meet the demands made by the outside world for the space of one month. He had told her that he would call again very soon.

'Did he say how Godfrey was?' asked Zeph, with much interest; 'it seems strange to know nothing' about him.'

'He did not know how he was, so I hope he is well,' replied Agnes; 'but he said he had received a letter from him written from some far-away foreign place—I have forgotten its name—I will try to remember it—but, after all, why should I puzzle my poor head, for you don't care to know it.'

This she said hoping to provoke some expression of affection. Zeph sighed, and said gently, 'Agnes, never say such a thing as that again! You do not know the pain you give me.'

'I wish he were here,' said Agnes, looking at Zeph's pale face as she lay propped up with cushions on the sofa, and thinking that nothing but reconciliation to Godfrey would ever make her well again.

'I don't,' said Zeph, hopelessly; 'if he were, I should be still more miserable.'

Polly came to see her, and looked at her compassionately with her kind, honest, anxious eyes. 'Dear child,' said she, when they were alone, 'you do look ill! I wish your doctor seemed to do more for you.'

Zeph was still seeing her doctor. He came twice or thrice a week, and smiled blandly in her face, fingered her pulse delicately, and enquired if there was any particular kind of food she could fancy, or amusement she could enjoy, and generally comported himself in such a way

that it was impossible to fail to see that in his estimation there was nothing the matter with her body, but a great deal amiss with her spirits.

‘My doctor is no good!’ said Zeph; ‘no doctor is any good to me but poor dear old Dr. Simonds—he knows me best.’

‘Let him come and see you now dear; I am sure he would, for half a word.’

Zeph shook her head, ‘I am sure he would not; you don’t know how unforgiving Mrs. Simonds is—she would not let him, even if he were willing.’

‘Let me ask him,’ said Polly.

‘Better not,’ replied Zeph. Then she looked up and said, ‘You and I understand each other, Polly, though we have never spoken of these old things. You have no need to assure me of John’s forgiveness, for I know how good he is, and I have no need to tell you how thoroughly I rejoice in his and your happiness. I do rejoice, though I always seem so quiet. Your engagement takes a weight

off my mind—in every way it is a relief to me.’

Polly’s warm, vigorous hand was stretched out at once to take the pale thin hand lying on her sister’s breast. It was cold, and Polly kept it in the comforting embrace of her own.

‘Now that I have said so much,’ continued Zeph, ‘I will say everything, and then, dear, you will know that my true heart lies open to you, but remember that I am speaking in confidence. I ought not to have married Godfrey; it was very wicked of me, but I was young and ignorant, and hardly knew what I was doing, and how wrong it was. I behaved cruelly ill to John. I was punished for it afterwards—for more than a year after I married Godfrey, I was unhappy about John; that may seem very wicked to you, dear, but my marrying Godfrey was the wicked part of the business, not my thinking of John, and fretting about him. I did think of him, Polly, I could not help it, and if you had got engaged to him then, it would have been a terrible trial to me.

Gradually, however, Godfrey's never-failing kindness and goodness won on me so that I began to love him most truly, and at last, my only feeling about John was shame at the way I had treated him, and grief at the thought of the harm I had done him. It was very painful to me to feel that perhaps he would think ill of all women for my sake, and never again have sufficient trust in any one to dare to love. When you and he became engaged, all seemed right. It was even right for me to love him, as I always shall, for his own sake, as well as for yours.'

Polly bent over her, kissed her, and said, 'Only one thing is wanted to make us all happy—you and Godfrey——'

'Oh, Polly,' said Zeph, bursting into tears, 'that is the worst of it! There is no happiness for me! I shall have to tell you all—he does not love me! Just when we might have been so happy, I found that what I had long feared was true—I had lost his love.'

'Oh, no, no! Impossible!' exclaimed

Polly. 'I heard him talk about you when he was at Seaton Court, and I know that that is impossible.'

'Unhappily it is true. I am sure of it—I have proof. If not, should I be lying here now, ill, and miserable, and parted from him? Polly, you don't know—these things do happen, and they have happened to me. I said things which he could never forgive. I behaved so strangely that he could have no belief in my affection—there was no ground on which to base a reconciliation. You don't know how wretched I have been, and yet I do so love him.'

'But all that seems to be necessary is that you should own it. You should say you love him, and show that you do. It is not too late.'

'It is quite too late!' replied Zeph, drearily. 'You would not have me show my love to a man who does not care for it? He has left me for ever! I shall see him no more.'

'But you drove him away! You insisted



on his leaving you! Zeph, if you have any love for me, or for him, or for any one, tell me why you did that?’

‘No, Polly,’ said Zeph, firmly, ‘that I must keep to myself;’ but even while she spoke she was longing to tell her sister all. It would be the greatest relief to do so. Polly was stronger in every way than Agnes, and if she knew, would give her help and comfort. ‘I wonder whether I dare tell you,’ faltered Zeph. ‘I wonder whether what seems to me so dreadful would strike you in the same way—but I dare not tell you; besides, I could not bear to make you think ill of Godfrey, for I know how much you like him.’

‘I shall always like him, and always respect him. He is as kind as a woman and as strong as a man. He could not do a mean action or a wrong thing.’

That decided Zeph. She could not bear to lessen her sister’s admiration for Godfrey—no, she would bear her own burden to the end.

‘I cannot tell you now,’ said she, ‘I may

never do so, but if I tell any one it shall be you. Promise not to let my father and mother know how unhappy I am ; and yet I am afraid father must know already, for why should Godfrey go away as he has, if something were not amiss ?’

‘ You have forgotten father’s ways, Zeph. He has not the slightest idea of anything of the kind ; indeed, he has almost forgotten that Godfrey has gone. Think again, dear, it would be such a relief to you to tell me. I might be able to——’

‘ Polly,’ said Zeph, solemnly, ‘ don’t tempt me to tell you what I ought not, but do something for me. Of course you see Dr. Simonds sometimes. Next time you go there ask him the name of the girl he spoke to about a month ago at the door of a studio in Somerset Place, Chelsea. I can tell you the exact date by thinking a little, but he will probably remember if you describe her. Say that she was a tall, slim, and very graceful girl of three- or four-and-twenty, with ruddy brown hair, and she was dressed in olive-green. She did not

seem well off, but she was well-mannered. It was strange that I should see her with Dr. Simonds. He met her close by Godfrey's studio door, and they seemed very pleased to see each other.'

'I will do it to-day,' said Polly, 'I am to dine there this evening. I will take an opportunity of asking it when Mrs. Simonds is not there. What name do you expect him to say?'

The abruptness of this question threw Zeph off her guard, and she answered immediately, 'Hester Langdale,' and then she hid her face in the cushions, for the very name tortured her.

'You seem to worry yourself a great deal about this Hester Langdale,' said Polly, who thought her sister most unreasonable.

'My dear Polly!' said Zeph, struggling with her grief.

'But why do you?' persisted Polly.

'I cannot tell you—don't ask. You may know some day.' And having said this, Zeph either could or would say no more.

Polly sat by her for more than an hour

trying to stop her crying, doing her best to win her confidence, but all in vain, and all the while Zeph looked so ill, so weak, so fragile and unhappy, that Polly was in the greatest distress and alarm. She felt so sure that something ought to be done, and done quickly, to save her sister, and so uncertain what that something ought to be. Were ever girls more desolate than they? They had parents, but if Polly went to them for help or advice she would come back as poor as she went—nay poorer, for she would have made them unhappy. Miss Everilda was kindness itself, but her helpfulness would probably express itself in a lyric—she would compare Zeph to the star-like jessamine in the drear north wind, or the perfumed violet 'mid the plashing rain, and meantime illness and unhappiness would keep what they had gained—the upper hand.

At last Polly had an idea. She rose suddenly, having taken á resolution. 'I am going,' said she. 'I may perhaps come back

to you in an hour or so. When does your doctor generally come?’

‘About four; but he was here yesterday, so he won’t come to-day. I don’t care whether he comes again or not, he is no good to me.’

‘Good-bye,’ said Polly, without showing any sympathy for Zeph’s dislike of her doctor. ‘Lie still; I will soon come back.’

Polly’s tone reminded Zeph of the days long ago when a speech of this kind seemed to convey a promise to bring back something good—but no one could bring back anything that was good in her eyes—all that was good had gone from her for ever. She said nothing, but watched Polly leave the room, and hoped that she would never know such pain as had fallen to her own lot.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## SOMETHING HAS GONE WRONG.

Not die ; but live a life of truest breath  
And teach true life to fight with mortal wrongs.

TENNYSON.

LONDON was getting very hot, and Polly found both the heat and the noise distressing after the coolness and quiet of Seaton Court. She walked quickly too, for she had a great project in her mind. She was bent on taking Dr. Simonds to cure Zeph. How was she to see him apart from the ogress who early in life had made her own of him ? Mrs. Simonds had never forgiven Zeph, and never lost an opportunity of proclaiming that she never would do so. Polly was afraid even to mention her sister's name in her presence. She knocked at the doctor's door before she went upstairs.

She had been familiar with the ways of the house ever since childhood, and knew that he was often at home at this hour. He was not at home that day. She went in search of Mrs. Simonds and soon found her. Mrs. Simonds, who always maintained that doctors' wives must follow the fashions, was sitting in something which she was pleased to call a tea-gown. It was made of grey plush trimmed with lace, and being, of course, loosely made, imparted a fine free outline to the lady who wore it.

‘Where is Dr. Simonds?’ asked Polly, boldly, though in her heart she was afraid.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ replied Mrs. Simonds. ‘What do you want with him? He will be here by-and-by, I dare say, but I thought you had come for a nice comfortable chat with me.’

Comfort and Mrs. Simonds were very wide apart; even good, kind Polly thought so, and smiled a little internally.

‘No, I want to see the doctor if I can; I want him to be so very kind as to go back

with me to see my sister Zeph ; she is so ill. She has a doctor, but he does her no good ; she has no faith in him, she has no faith in any one but your husband !’

‘It will be faith without works then,’ said Mrs. Simonds, grimly, ‘for she certainly will not get my husband to demean himself by going near her ! You must excuse me speaking plainly, Polly, I must speak as I feel.’

‘Come, dear Mrs. Simonds, be forgiving,’ pleaded Polly ; ‘Zeph owns her fault. John has forgiven her. He has a great regard for her, and wants everything to be smoothed over, and all of us to be good friends.’

‘John is foolishly forgiving. He may do as he likes, and be friends with her if he chooses ; but I never will, and my husband shall not either ! He shall not go near her if I can stop him. I have a particular dislike to wickedness set up in high places !’

‘Don’t be unkind to me,’ urged Polly, in great distress. ‘She is my sister, and she is very ill ; I am most unhappy about her.’



‘She was always fond of making people unhappy!’ observed Mrs. Simonds, who seemed to think that Zeph’s illness was a malicious attack on Polly’s peace. ‘Here is Ralph! but he shall not go!’

‘I don’t think Dr. Simonds will refuse the first request I make,’ said Polly, gently.

‘No,’ said the doctor, gallantly, ‘nor the second, nor even the hundredth if I keep my present opinion of you, dear.’

‘One must marry you, Ralph, I suppose,’ said Mrs. Simonds, ‘to have one’s requests refused; that seems to be my case.’

Dr. Simonds looked bewildered, but Polly, with many apologies to Mrs. Simonds for attempting to controvert her will, told her story. Mrs. Simonds, who soon saw that she was certain to be worsted, made some excuse for leaving the room. She retreated, consoling herself with the idea that her husband would at all events secure a good patient, for this fanciful creature in Ambassadors’ Gate was sure to be always imagining herself to be ill. She

was 'not a person of any resources—fancying herself ill was one of the few employments left open to such people.'

Polly narrated her story simply, and soon interested the doctor. Zeph was ill, weak, and alone, and in her illness her thoughts had turned to him; that was quite enough to make the doctor, who had known her ever since she was a baby, wish to go to her. Why should he not? All the evil she had done to John was at an end; John had fallen on his feet, and had got the best of the three sisters for his own. The doctor was delighted with Polly and the engagement. He had the highest opinion of her head and heart, and listened to all she told him with the greatest concern. As yet she had not touched on any family secret, nor had she remembered to make the promised enquiry.

'Has your sister anything on her mind?' he asked.

Polly burst into tears.

'Let us go,' he said, 'I have half an hour at least to spare, and will go with you now.'

‘Stop one minute,’ said Polly, ‘I had to ask you a question. Who was the pretty girl dressed in olive-green whom you met and shook hands with in Somerset Place a week or two ago?’

He shook his head in despair. ‘My dear, I shake hands with all kinds of people. I have not the remotest idea. Some patient of mine in whom I took an interest, I suppose; but that is no clue, for I am interested in all of them. Red hair, did you say?’

‘Yes, not flaming red; rather like bronze, Zeph said. Do try to think who she was. Zeph is so anxious to know.’

‘Impossible! I have not the least idea!’

‘Oh, but do try to remember. She seemed pleased to see you; you seemed pleased to see her. She was tall and slim, young and pretty.’

‘Young and pretty,’ repeated the doctor, ‘but, my dear child, I am thankful to say hundreds of persons exist who answer to that description.’

‘You were standing at the door of a studio.’

‘I daresay we were, but I don’t know when or where. There are a great many studios down there.’

Here Polly either confused her instructions or was carried away by zeal, for she said, ‘Was it Hester Langdale?’

‘My dear,’ exclaimed the doctor, in a startled voice, ‘do you mean to tell me that you know anything about Hester Langdale?’

‘No,’ replied Polly, simply ‘I know nothing whatsoever about her. Was that girl Hester?’

‘No, certainly not. I never saw, or spoke to Hester Langdale there; she could not be there! Tell me why you ask this? Why do you want to know if I spoke to Hester Langdale there?’

‘Ought I to answer that? Zeph might not like me to do so; but when I come to think, I cannot answer it. I know nothing of Hester Langdale. I have no idea why Zeph wished me to put that question, I only know that she is making herself completely miserable about

her, or something connected with her. I ought not to say so much—all that I was told to do was to ask you the name of a very pretty girl, dressed as I described just now when she spoke to you in Somerset Place.'

'I don't know,' said the doctor, hopelessly, 'I am very sorry, but I really do not know. I see a great many girls, some pretty, some plain—it may have been some one who was in the hospital.'

'I daresay it was, Ralph,' said Mrs. Simonds, who had approached them unawares, 'I should think it extremely likely that it was! I never liked that hospital. It seems to me to be a place where good, respectable, middle-aged medical men just go for the pleasure of being able to chatter for half an hour or so with silly young creatures of twenty.'

'And cure them when they are ill,' suggested the doctor.

'They are all actresses and artists' models, I have no doubt,' remarked Mrs. Simonds, 'and such people are much better ill—if illness does

nothing else for them, it sometimes brings them to their senses. Frivolous, foolish creatures!’

‘You are under a great mistake,’ replied the doctor; ‘but we must go, Polly.’

After a word or two to Mrs. Simonds they began to go downstairs, but when they were half-way she came to the landing and called after her husband: ‘I suppose you are aware, Ralph, that I do not approve of what you are doing! I am sure you mean well and kindly, but I think it very foolish.’

‘I must not stop to argue about it now,’ answered Dr. Simonds, ‘I shall see you again very shortly, my dear.’ And so he left.

‘You *are* kind!’ said Polly, when they were safely seated in a hansom. ‘I ought to explain to you that Zeph does not know that I have come for you. It was entirely my own idea.’

‘It was a very good one; I am very glad to go. You spoke of an artist’s studio just now. What artist was it? I did not know that you knew any.’

‘Mr. Daylesford paints,’ replied Polly. ‘He has a studio in Chelsea—or had before he went away.’

‘Went away? Where is he?’

‘I don’t believe any one knows exactly; he is in Persia, I think, or perhaps in India.’

‘Doesn’t his wife know?’ enquired the doctor, who saw vistas of sorrow opening out before him.

Polly hung her head and could not make up her mind to answer for some time—at last she said: ‘Something has gone wrong; you had better not know too much about it; if you could persuade her to confide in you it would be a good thing.’

‘I will try,’ said he, and was silent. He was sure that this trouble was connected with Hester Langdale. Polly too was silent; now that she was actually driving to Ambassadors’ Gate with Dr. Simonds, she began to be afraid of Zeph’s anger. Zeph had been a formidable personage to her sisters in the old days in Lorne Gardens, and they had not yet shaken

off their awe of her. 'I will go and forewarn her,' suggested Polly.

'No, let me go in with you,' replied the doctor, 'I assure you it will be better—it is not as if I were a stranger.'

With some misgivings Polly yielded, and they walked into the room together. Zeph was lying just as Polly had left her, but her complexion was even more unearthly. She did not look up until she heard a strange foot-step. She seemed startled when she saw the doctor, but he fancied that when her surprise was over, she was rather glad to see him.

'I have come,' said he, 'because I heard you were ill. I have known you ever since you were a child. One cannot forget these things, and you and your sisters have always been dear to me. For the sake of old times you must let me see if I can do anything to help you to your health again.'

After the first few words Zeph had gratefully laid her hand in his, and now she was lying with a pleased smile on her lips. Polly



and Agnes withdrew, and the doctor began to ask a variety of medical questions, to all of which Zeph responded as best she might.

‘You understand that I am here only as a friend—I could not attend you in any other capacity—it would be contrary to professional etiquette, but in all you have told me I detect no source of alarm—nothing to cause this low state of health. My dear child, keep nothing back from me. You may trust me.’

Zeph was silent. He saw that she was touched by his words, but dared not speak. ‘I have always pitied you children,’ he resumed, ‘you seemed to be left so much to yourselves. You have never had a father or mother to whom you could go with your little troubles and your big troubles. You have had to struggle with them yourselves. That adds to their weight and difficulty, until at last you faint under it. Zeph, my dear, I shall soon be a relative of yours, and I want to be a kind one; trust me; tell me what is distressing you so much. If you will, I have a conviction that I can supply a cure.’

Zeph shook her head and said, 'Oh, no. There is something—I cannot deny that; but I cannot speak of it—least of all to you.'

'Dear child, you surely do not think that I am less willing to help you because of things which happened in the past? If you do you are mistaken. You caused me and mine sorrow once, I own it, but it is all over now—my sorrow has turned into exceeding great gladness. I thoroughly love and respect your dear sister, and for her sake I would come to you, as I do now, even if I had not another reason—two other reasons in fact.'

Tears came to Zeph's eyes—she was nothing to any one—every one who had ever cared for her could live happily—nay more than happily—without her. John and John's father were congratulating themselves on having got Polly in lieu of herself; even this good old doctor was only talking so kindly because she was Polly's sister. But it was not for her to repine, she was but reaping what she had sown. 'What reasons?' she enquired very humbly,

but with a faint hope that a certain amount of regard for herself entered into the composition of one of them.

‘Firstly, because I have seen you grow up almost before my eyes; and secondly, because the business of my life is to heal and to help, and I think if you would trust me, I might help you—I am certain I could!’

Zeph looked wistfully in his rugged worn face. It had been familiar to her from her earliest youth. He had always been grimly kind, but that was only because she had never needed any more particular kindness. Now she saw a glow of benevolence in his eyes, and the sternness of his features was softened away by the earnestness of his desire to give back hope and health to her.

‘Thank you, thank you, most truly,’ said she, ‘but it is so dreadful to speak of things.’

‘I daresay it is,’ he replied, ‘and after all talking is bad for you, but I have some time on my hands this afternoon,’—alas, poor man, what a fiction that was!—‘and I think I

should like to stay here with you a while if you will allow me—don't speak, I will do the talking. What shall we talk about? Let me see—Polly made some enquiries about a girl I know very well. Let me tell you part of her history. We doctors are supposed to have very disagreeable lives, but somehow or other we see people under circumstances which oblige them to show their true characters, and some of them come out nobly—women especially. Polly asked me some questions about a girl—she said that you were curious about her—no, anxious about her, I think she said. My dear, if you knew Hester Langdale as I do, you would soon see that you had no cause for anxiety.'

He glanced at Zeph. Her eyes were riveted on his, and full of the keenest interest. 'Yes,' he resumed, 'Hester Langdale comes nearer to being a saint than any woman I ever saw.'

Zeph's face flushed; her eyes drooped, the hope she had begun to cherish was gone.

‘Oh, how mistaken you are?’ said she. ‘Unhappily, I know more about her than you do. I know all about her—if I did not, I should not be lying here now.’

‘You are probably aware of one fact, one most unhappy fact which she deploras as much as you. But she is an angel, not a woman! You do not know what her life has been during the last two years,—since your marriage, I mean.’

Zeph was silent for a moment—for a moment the doctor’s earnestness awed her in spite of her better knowledge. He evidently looked on Hester as ‘a thing enskyed and sainted,’ and Zeph felt that any ill words or evil accusations would glide off the pure and holy image of her which he had set up in his mind, leaving on it no mark or defacement.

‘And then you must not forget that she loved him very truly,’ added the doctor.

Zeph hid her face in her hands, and once more felt scorched to the heart with shame. The doctor was doubtless thinking what God-

frey had not scrupled to say, that when her own life's history and Hester's were judged, the Great Judge of all would say, 'Woman, you had no right to condemn her; her life was purer than your own. It was you who sold yourself, not she.' Zeph knew it—she felt it—she acknowledged it in all humility now.

'I am not blaming her for what occurred before I knew Godfrey,' she said, struggling with a pain in her throat which hardly left her the power of speech, 'I am not making myself unhappy about that, but I do think she might \_\_\_\_\_'

'Might have left me my husband now,' was what she was about to say, but for Godfrey's sake she forced herself to be silent. The doctor was ignorant of much that she knew; if he were not, he would not dare to exalt this woman as a saint.

'My dear child,' continued Dr. Simonds, 'how unreasonable you are! If you are not distressing yourself about that, I can assure you you have no other cause of distress!'

On this Zeph's passion broke forth into words, and she exclaimed, 'Doctor, how can you uphold this wicked girl? She deceives you! She is unworthy of your kindness. I did wrong—shamefully wrong, when I married Godfrey—I know I did, but the wrong would have been righted long ago, and he would have forgiven me and we should have been happy, if it had not been for this wretched woman! She never really left him—perhaps I ought to say that he never really left her. I was a fool not to know it—I never did know it. I thought he loved me, and me only. Even when he offered to me, he was advertising for her and trying to find out where she was. I myself saw the advertisement in the newspaper at the time, and did not know what it meant, but the other day all was explained, for I found this—as if I were not miserable enough already, I found this!' So saying, she went to her desk, and took out a rough copy of a letter to the editor of the *Times*, dated July 15th, and signed, Godfrey Daylesford,

requesting that an announcement consisting of four words only should appear at the top of the second column in the supplement for one month. The words were, 'Hester, you were wrong,' and they were to be printed in capital letters. The word month was corrected into fortnight and then into three weeks, and that was apparently why this copy had been discarded.

'That announcement appeared even after I was engaged to Godfrey. I read it myself. Now, doctor, answer one question. If he could put such an announcement in the *Times*, at such a moment, was our marriage likely to be happy? Had I any chance?'

'My dear, I can explain it all—I can explain it quite easily, but I would rather convince you in another way.'

'No one can convince me—everything points to my place being filled by another woman. He did find her—he found her soon after we returned from abroad—I wish we never had returned. I have never known what



it was to be happy since. That woman soon regained her influence over him. She made him take to his painting again. She paints too; Godfrey got a studio out of the house—far from home, down at Chelsea, and she and he painted there together. I was never allowed to go, lest I should see her. You do not know what I have suffered; and there is more—much more. I have reason to believe that they went to Paris together. I have proof of it—I know she went. That is why I said I would never live with him again, and made him go away. He went abroad, and she no doubt accompanied him. I never expect to see him again.’

‘May I ring for your maid?’ said the doctor.

‘You may do anything you like,’ replied Zeph, in despair. If he were so little affected by her distress as to talk of ringing for maids, what was the use of his coming to see her? ‘You seem to think nothing of what I have just told you!’ she said bitterly; ‘I repeat to you that after I became engaged to him this advertise-

ment appeared in the *Times*. I read it myself with the odd kind of fascination we have for anything which closely concerns us, though I had no idea then that it could concern me. I knew no one of the name of Hester—I had never heard this wretched woman's name. Four days ago I found this paper in a book in the library, and then the whole thing came back to me, and I understood it, and now I do not see how you can defend Hester Langdale !'

'Wait one moment,' urged Dr. Simonds. 'If I show you Hester Langdale now in a place which to my certain knowledge she has never left for more than an hour since about three weeks after your husband went off in such a hurry to Santa Eulalia when he thought his brother was killed in the earthquake, will you believe what I have told you about her?'

'But can you?' faltered Zeph; 'I don't see how you can.'

'I can, and I will. Here is your maid, tell her to bring your bonnet, and what you wear when you go out, and let me take you.'

‘Bring your mistress’s things,’ said he, authoritatively, for he saw that Zeph shrank from doing what he asked. ‘My dear, I do not wish you to do anything difficult or wrong. Come with me, and you will see Hester Langdale doing good womanly work which she has been doing ever since she recovered from the illness during which I attended her. She was brought to St. Elizabeth’s when she was ill, she got to know the ways of the place—she was penitent, broken-hearted, and entirely alone in the world, and her hope was that by devoting herself to work she might regain a certain measure of peace.’

‘Ah!’ murmured Zeph, gently, ‘she was suffering! One forgets that even people of this kind must suffer sometimes. But do you mean that she has never left the hospital?’

‘Never for more than an hour, and I do not think that she has often been absent even so long. She is fond of nursing—she feels of use—the patients like her, and their gratitude is her only happiness. She might have had a

brilliant future, for she was a very clever painter, but she laid down all earthly hopes at the feet of God. Come, I will take you to her ward. You can look at her, there is no need to speak. I will do all the talking.'

Zeph still felt great repugnance.

'My dear, you must come! I insist on it. You are one of the doubting people who are only convinced by the evidence of their own senses. Come—all that you will have to do will be to stand by my side while I walk through the ward; I will give you my arm.'

'I will come,' said Zeph.

They were soon at the hospital, but already her courage was almost gone.

'Take me back,' said she, 'I shall faint—I shall do something foolish!'

'Nothing of the kind!' said Dr. Simonds; 'you will take my arm and walk quietly through this ward with me—that's all. You are not to speak, and you have a thick veil on—no one can recognise you.'

‘Don’t go near her, then,’ pleaded Zeph.

They ascended the wide easy stairs and came to a door. The doctor looked to see if there were any fear of Zeph’s breaking down, and then entered a long, lofty, airy room. On each side of it was a row of beds, pretty, pink-quilted beds, set far apart from each other, and all occupied. Each pillow was pressed by a patient’s head, and all looked very ill. Some were sleeping, some writhing in pain, some lying with dull apathetic eyes, fixed on what seemed to them to be vacancy. Had it not been for the knowledge that these men were ill, and some sick even unto death, the ward would have seemed bright and cheerful. Even Zeph was struck with the perfect order and delicate cleanliness. There were flowers in abundance, and singing-birds, pictures and prints. She took these things in at a glance. They made up a background of which she was conscious, though she was so touched by the sight of so many suffering fellow-creatures that for a moment she almost forgot what she had

come to do. Nurses were moving about, performing this or that slight but precious service.

‘Hester is one of the nurses,’ said the doctor; ‘you will see her directly. I will touch your arm when we come near her.’

Zeph looked at the nurses. They were quiet, womanly, gentle-looking creatures, all dressed alike in soft blue-and-white print dresses, white caps, and large white aprons. She saw one more pretty than any of the others, and expected the promised signal, for she had always thought of Hester as beautiful, but the doctor walked quietly on until he came to a bed where a poor man was lying, who was evidently in great pain. A nurse was bathing his forehead and hands with vinegar and water, and so occupied with her task that she had no eyes or thoughts for anything else. Zeph could not see her face, but she saw a lock of pretty brown hair peeping out under her cap. The warning was given—that, then, was Hester Langdale. Zeph’s heart stood still.

‘How is he to-day?’ asked Dr. Simonds. Hester turned and gave the doctor a quiet smile of recognition, and in a moment Zeph received such an impression of angelic goodness and purity that all ill thoughts of the woman who bore the name of Hester Langdale were banished at once and for ever. She was in this world, but not of it; her mind was filled with noble thoughts, her heart with mercy and love. The touch of her hand would surely bring help, the sight of her face comfort.

‘God forgive me for wronging her!’ thought Zeph; ‘I wish I could ever hope to be half as near heaven as she is.’

Hester’s voice was soft and musical, and in a few businesslike words she was informing the doctor of his patient’s exact condition. The patient himself seemed afraid that she was going to leave him.

‘You have done quite right, nurse,’ said Dr. Simonds, and passed on. He was afraid of trying Zeph too much. Zeph did not feel it a trial to be there now. She looked back, and

saw Hester once more completely absorbed by her ministrations, and felt that her life was holy, and that no one could approach her without feeling prompted to kind deeds and good thoughts. It never for one moment occurred to Zeph that Hester was not beautiful—she was most beautiful—she possessed that highest beauty of all, a mind so good and noble and so tenderly submissive to duty that no eye could rest on her without being conscious of it. Zeph walked on with the doctor, but she turned more than once to look at Hester, who was aware of nothing but the work she was doing.

‘Shall we go?’ enquired Dr. Simonds.

‘Yes, take me home,’ she replied. ‘Please take me home. Wait one moment, and then let us go.’ She went to the box for charitable contributions and emptied her purse into it. She took off some rings and dropped them in; then they left the place together. She threw herself back in the carriage in utter self-abasement; she despised her own miserably selfish



and suspicious character from the very bottom of her heart.

‘Was I wrong?’ said the doctor.

Zeph looked humbly in his face and answered, ‘Dear Dr. Simonds, no. I would give all I possess to be as good as she is!’

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## A MOST STRANGE LIKENESS.

The Sun may shine and we be cold.—E. B. BROWNING.

À cœur blessé—l'ombre et le silence.—BALZAC.

DAYS passed—a week passed, and yet though Zeph had professed entire belief in Hester, and satisfaction at the result of her visit to St. Elizabeth's, she still lay on the sofa, or wandered about the house, looking the picture of misery, and no one could induce her to go out. Dr. Simonds was disappointed in her. He had expected that the moment she found she was tormenting herself without a cause, there would be a strong rebound in the direction of health, but instead of that she seemed more desponding than ever. At first she had seemed happy and at rest, but after an hour or two she had reverted to her original gloom. The truth

was the unhappy girl had a reason for her grief. Hester might be, and was, above suspicion, but some one else was not, and it was most terrible to Zeph to know that there was this some one else. Who was the girl in olive-green who haunted the studio in Somerset Place, and whose wearing apparel travelled in Godfrey's portmanteau? Zeph was wretched. Polly was in despair at seeing her in such a state, Agnes cross, and Dr. Simonds out of patience. He had hoped everything from giving this fanciful woman proof that she was wrong, and she was as woebegone as ever, and, what was worse, he could not persuade her to tell him what was on her mind now. Polly was with her continually; in the midst of her own happiness, Zeph's sorrow was a dark spot which never could be overlooked.

‘Rouse yourself, Zeph!’ she said one morning. ‘Rouse yourself, and you will soon be all right again. Dr. Simonds says he has convinced you that you were tormenting yourself about something which was entirely ima-

ginary, and yet you go on doing it just the same.'

'Dr. Simonds convinced me that I had made a mistake on one point; he never convinced me that I had no cause to be unhappy; no one can do that—no one—besides, I think he was mistaken himself.'

'Zeph! Zeph!' exclaimed Polly, 'what is the matter? Why are you looking like that?'

It was not surprising that Polly was startled. Zeph, whose sofa was very near the window, had started up, ill as she was, and was standing clasping her forehead with both hands, and her eyes were ablaze with indignant astonishment.

'My dearest Zeph!' again said Polly, 'what is it? what do you see?' She did not content herself, however, with making these enquiries, but hastened to her sister's side.

'There!' exclaimed Zeph, pointing to the portico, 'there she is! You ask me why I am so unhappy, that is the woman who is making me miserable! There, standing at the

door, that is Hester Langdale—there are two women of the name. I was sure there was some mistake.’

Polly looked and saw a tall graceful girl dressed in olive-green, standing outside by the door, and patiently waiting till her modest knock was attended to.

‘Who is she? Zeph, what can you mean?’ asked Polly.

‘Oh, don’t ask me about her—how dare she come here!’ said Zeph, hoarsely, and then as her feet refused to bear her any longer, she sat down on the edge of the sofa and pressed both hands to her heart. But she heard the great door of the house open, and sprang to her feet again in time to see the girl outside in earnest conversation with the servant, and then she seemed to yield to a suggestion that she should enter the house. Zeph heard the heavy door close again with a dull sound, and knew that she and this woman were now beneath the same roof. What was about to happen? How could she dare to do this!

The footman now came to ask if Mrs. Daylesford would kindly give him Mr. Daylesford's present address.

'I cannot,' replied Zeph, hoarsely; 'he is moving about.'

The servant retreated, and probably had to answer a number of questions, for if the girl had left the house Zeph must have seen her. After what seemed a very long time, measured as it was by the throbbing pulsations of a heart excited almost beyond the point of endurance, Agnes came and said, with perfect calmness, and something of the manner of a person who has already had more trouble than enough about a matter of no importance: 'Zeph dear, I would not trouble you if I could help it, but do you happen to know anything about a green serge cap? There is a girl in the hall who wants one which she thinks ought to be found somewhere among Godfrey's possessions. I have been looking round for it, but do not seem able to see it anywhere.'

Zeph looked petrified. Agnes stood won-

dering why this very simple question should produce such a startling effect.

‘My dear Zeph,’ said she, ‘you are ill I know, but don’t give way to nervousness; I only want an answer to a very simple question; but after all, I don’t suppose you know anything about the poor girl’s cap.’

‘Don’t trouble yourself about it!’ said Zeph. ‘Tell Charles to say that no one knows where it is, and that she must go at once.’

Agnes stared at her—Zeph was speaking so angrily—she was so unlike herself.

‘I think it is a person called Hester Langdale——’ she began.

‘Well, perhaps it is, but she ought to have her cap if she wants it. Poor girl, she does not look as if she could afford to lose it,’ said Agnes, pleadingly.

Zeph rose indignantly and made a few steps towards the door.

Polly laid a restraining hand on her arm and made her sit down, and then said to Agnes,

‘Tell Zeph more about this: who wants the cap, and why she thinks it is here, I mean.’

‘It is a girl who sits to Godfrey for the picture he is painting at the studio who wants it,’ Agnes replied quickly, ‘a model she calls herself—and she wants it because it is hers.’

‘A model!’ exclaimed Zeph; ‘but I did not know that when people talked about a model they meant a real girl. I thought a model was a thing they sometimes call a lay figure—but that accounts for so much!’

‘You must tell me what to do,’ said Agnes, ‘she is waiting outside, and we have kept her so long. She has heard that Godfrey has gone abroad, and so, as he cannot want the cap now, and as it goes with the dress she is wearing, she would like to have it. She is quite civil about it, dear, and wishes me to say that if it was likely to be of any further use to Mr. Daylesford, and he wanted to keep it, he was most welcome to do so; but she does not seem to think that likely, as he is away.’

‘Use to Godfrey! What can she mean?’



enquired Zeph, who still spoke with great difficulty, but looked calmer.

‘It seems that it is a peculiar shade of green, one that Godfrey admires very much, and he wanted, if possible, to get some Indian silk of the same colour to make a dress for his model for this picture, or for some other picture—for I forget the exact words—and he employed this Hester Langdale—wasn’t that the name you called her?—to search a number of shops in Oxford Street and Regent Street to see if she could find the silk in London, but she could not, so when he went to Paris—not last time, you know, but the first time—he borrowed Hester’s cap and took it with him to see if he could get what he wanted there.’

During this lengthy explanation, Zeph’s face had been a perfect study—its expression had gradually changed from abject misery to timid anxious hope. She turned to Agnes and said: ‘Tell some one to look in Godfrey’s dressing-room.’

‘I won’t ask you to explain what has passed,

but I can see that you are much happier for it,' said Polly, when they were alone.

'No, don't ask me to explain anything yet, I could not do it if you did; but I will tell you one thing; I was wicked enough to think that this girl was abroad with Godfrey now. Suppose I have been as mistaken in everything else as in that?'

'No doubt you have; go and see her yourself,' urged Polly; 'ask her a few questions, and——'

'I speak to Hester Langdale!' exclaimed Zeph. 'Impossible!'

Agnes came dancing in with the cap; Zeph, alas! had seen it before; how she wished she had never done so; what misery it had cost her!

'I want Zeph to go and say a few words to this Hester Langdale,' said Polly, 'but she——'

'Hester Langdale! That's not her name,' interrupted Agnes. 'I asked her what it was as I came past, and it is Juliet Meyrick.'

‘Are you sure?’ said Zeph.

‘At all events she says so, and it is what Godfrey calls her. She showed me a note he had written her from Paris when he went back last time. He sent her a five-pound note, and said that he released her from all engagement to sit to him, for he was going to travel about, and did not intend to return to England for many years.’

Zeph was now looking as white as her dress and utterly exhausted by this most trying scene. Polly made Agnes a sign to cut it short. She was afraid Zeph would be really ill. Agnes went to give the girl her cap and dismiss her, and Zeph and Polly were again alone. Zeph sighed deeply; was it a sigh of complete fatigue and disheartenment, or was it a sigh of relief and hopefulness?

‘You said that Dr. Simonds knew this girl,’ exclaimed Polly, with a sudden remembrance of what she had been told. ‘Ask him about her when he comes; he will be here soon; I heard him say so.’

‘Do I know a model called Juliet?—I suppose you mean Juliet Meyrick?’ said he, later in the day, when he came. ‘Of course I do. Polly asked me about a slim red-haired girl I had been speaking to somewhere lately, but she forgot to say she was an artist’s model. If she had given me that clue I could have told her all she wanted to know at once. Juliet is one of the best girls in the world. I will tell you her story. Her father was an architect, a very clever fellow indeed, who was just beginning to make his way when he died. He left a wife, who had an incurable illness, and two daughters almost entirely unprovided for. Juliet had a lover; a poor man, but he was ready to share his means with her. She would not desert her mother. Juliet tried to earn her living by her pencil. This threw her among artists and people of that kind, and she soon found that she could earn more as an artist’s model than by painting, and she now keeps her mother—humbly enough, but they are very happy. I know them thoroughly well.

Mrs. Meyrick was in the hospital, and I got to know them all. Juliet, no doubt, has been sitting to your husband, and if so he has been fortunate in his model. She is very pretty, and, as I have said before, as good a girl as ever lived.'

Zeph could not speak, her feelings overpowered her. The vast edifice which she had so carefully built up of base suspicions had suddenly crumbled away before a few words of truth. She had tormented herself, her husband, and every one about her for nothing. She had driven away her husband and lost his love. She felt as if she should like to journey forth on foot over rough places and smooth, and take no rest until at last she had found him, and could throw herself at his feet, and beg for pardon. Dr. Simonds left her, and she sat for some time woefully contemplating the prospect which lay before her.

'Mr. Blackmore is here, ma'am, and wishes to see you,' said the footman, breaking in on her melancholy occupation. She went slowly

into the breakfast-room, feeling mortified at the thought that even this man knew that she and her husband were separated for life. She was so ashamed of what he must be thinking of her that she could not look him in the face. He bowed; she was conscious of that, though she never raised her eyes. He said, 'Madam, I come once more, by Mr. Godfrey Daylesford's request, to see if I can be of any assistance to you. I have brought a cheque-book, which Mr. Godfrey Daylesford hopes you will not scruple to use whenever you are in need of money.'

Zeph gathered with pain that in this man's mind the word husband was inapplicable—Godfrey was henceforth to be Mr. Daylesford to her. Mr. Blackmore was right. She was no longer anything to Godfrey—she told herself so, and tried to accept the fact bravely; then she said, still without raising her eyes, 'I would rather know how much I am expected to spend. Can you not fix a sum?—I do not wish it to be a large one;

in fact, I will not accept more than is absolutely necessary.'

'I do not imagine, madam, that Mr. Godfrey Daylesford has any desire to limit you. Of course there is a limit at which I myself should feel bound to utter a word of warning, or remonstrance, but you are not likely to overstep it.'

'Thank you, but I much prefer a fixed allowance.'

'I can understand that, madam, and when I have an opportunity will communicate your desire; but that will not be for some time, and I am sure Mr. Godfrey Daylesford does not wish——'

'But I wish——' interrupted Zeph, 'I wish to have as little as possible;' and as she spoke she lifted her eyes to her lawyer's face, and started when she saw it, for, feature for feature, and line by line, save for the difference between middle age and old age, she saw before her the little brown gentleman she had met in the gallery at Berkhampstead on the first night of

her arrival there. 'Mr. Blackmore,' she said, in the utmost surprise and alarm, 'you have no idea what a shock you have given me!'

'You must excuse me,' he replied; 'I am but obeying instructions. I know this is a painful business—most painful—these things always are, it is their nature to be so; but everything shall be done that lies in my power to spare your feelings. Mr. Godfrey Daylesford wishes it—I wish it myself, madam.'

'It is not that,' replied Zeph, hastily, for it was terrible to have this little legal gentleman fingering her heart-wounds so freely; 'it is not that; don't let us say anything about that. It is a most strange likeness. It is wonderful that I did not notice it when I saw you before!' and Zeph's heart sank as she recalled the time when she had last seen him. It was just before her marriage, and he had read some papers aloud in her presence; her mind had probably then been so occupied with other thoughts that she had never so much as looked at him. 'Do tell me something,' said she, eagerly. 'Your



father was a lawyer too, I know; did he wear brown clothes, and was he a pleasant-looking man, with straight grey hair, and was he rather stout and short, and did he wear a shade over his left eye and a double eyeglass?’

‘So far as your description goes, it is perfectly accurate,’ said Mr. Blackmore; ‘but I did not know that you had ever seen him. He died more than four years before your marriage with my client, Mr. Godfrey Daylesford. He died on February 7, 18——’

Zeph sighed; these recollections involved other recollections which were far from making her happy, but the subject was so interesting to her that she could not pursue it. ‘Yes, and it was on February 7, just four years later, that I first went to Berkhamstead.’

‘Indeed, madam!’ said the lawyer, with very faint interest.

‘Yes, that was the very day, and I was in the great gallery at one o’clock that night, or rather that morning, and I saw a gentleman who was exactly like you, only dressed differently,

and of course much older. He was walking slowly along the gallery with a candle in his hand, the light fell on his face, and I saw it perfectly, and besides that, I saw a photograph of him next day. I remember it distinctly, and I remember too that Godfrey—Mr. Daylesford, I mean—seemed anxious to change the subject whenever I asked about this gentleman whom I had seen. Mr. Blackmore, I must have seen your father's ghost.'

'We should have to believe in ghosts, madam, before we could admit that,' replied the lawyer, coldly. 'One thing that makes your story curious is that it was the anniversary of the day on which my father died—indeed it was the very hour. Stories of this kind are undeniably curious, but they are nothing more. There is nothing in them—there never can be anything in them. To return to business: you understand, I hope, that Mr. Godfrey Daylesford wishes you to remain in this house and to have a liberal income. I believe I may take it on myself to say that he is prepared to

let you draw to the extent of two thousand a year.'

'Then let me assure you that I am not prepared to do anything of the kind,' answered Zeph, decidedly. 'It is very kind of him, but I shall only spend what is absolutely necessary. Did you ever hear of any one else seeing this apparition?'

'Never!' replied Mr. Blackmore. 'I should imagine that you had heard a description of my father, or seen the photograph you speak of, and fancied——'

'Oh no, I fancied nothing—I saw a figure which looked exactly like a real person—and it is very strange!'

'Oh!' exclaimed Mr. Blackmore, suddenly, 'I had forgotten something! You asked me just now if I had ever heard of any one else seeing the same appearance, and I said no; but my sister once did—I forgot it when you asked me. I have a great contempt for ghosts and ghost stories, and they slip out of my mind.'

'Do tell me about your sister,' said Zeph.

‘What did she see? I have a very particular reason for wishing to know.’ She had begun to think that this apparition had come to afford some clue to the discovery of the papers which were so important to the family happiness.

‘I will tell you all I can remember,’ said Mr. Blackmore, with the lofty air of a man of science talking down to a person who was the prey of weak and superstitious beliefs. ‘As I said before, I soon dismiss such stories as these from my mind. My late father used to go to Berkhamstead four or five times every year to receive rents and arrange business matters connected with the estate. On one occasion he took my sister with him—she was not well, and he thought that a few days’ change would do her good. It was in the old lord’s time of course, but he was not at home, and no one was in the castle but the servants. My sister was put into a large sombre-looking bedroom with windows towards the garden, and the housekeeper had been so foolish as to tell her a great many

stories before she went to bed, which frightened her. These were all about a farmer's daughter who had married one of the noblemen who owned the estate, years and years before. This girl had never been well received by the county, and when she died had, by some odd caprice of her husband's, been buried in the garden. This Lady Berkhamstead was said to haunt the castle, and the silly old housekeeper told my poor little sister, who was only a child, so many stories of her having been seen here and there about the rooms and corridors, that the unfortunate girl was afraid to go to bed. The castle is, as you know, a great rambling, gloomy-looking place, and you can perhaps excuse a young person feeling nervous?'

'Indeed I can,' replied Zeph, with great interest; 'I was nervous myself at first; I have gone through the whole thing myself. Do tell me more.'

'My sister had been spending the evening with the housekeeper, for my father was too busy to have her with him, and did not like

her to be alone. He was sitting in the library, busy with accounts and looking over papers, and the housekeeper had used the time to such good purpose that, when bedtime came, my little sister was terrified at the thought of being left alone, and longed to ask the housekeeper to sleep with her, but was too shy. At last she ascertained that her father was to sleep in a room near hers—that cheered her a little, and she went to seek him to see if he were ready to go. He said he should not be long, so she went away in tolerable comfort; but no sooner was she in bed than she was filled with terror. She tried to shake it off, but could not; and at last got up, lit a candle, partly dressed herself, opened the door, and stood waiting till her father came upstairs. She has so often described all this to me that I am able to tell it to you exactly as it happened. She said that she seemed to stand by that half-opened door for hours. She thought her father would never come. At last she heard a distant door shut, and a sound of distant footsteps which gradually

came nearer, and she saw her father ascending the stairs at the end of the long gallery, and then coming slowly towards her. He came nearer and nearer, and then she drew back a little, for he looked very stern, and she was afraid that he would be angry if he saw that she had not gone to bed; but she held the door ajar, and peeped, and still watched him advancing towards her. Suddenly, and without the least warning, she lost sight of him altogether, and to this day is unable to explain how. She was so startled by his strange disappearance that she almost screamed. She stood pressing her hands to her heart to still its beating, waiting, and watching for a long time, but all was quiet, and after this she saw no more. At last she crept back to bed, and I believe ended by falling asleep; but——'

'But, my dear Mr. Blackmore,' exclaimed Zeph, panting with excitement, 'it is exactly what I saw, and what I felt! She had the same bedroom that I had, and she saw just

what I did. Do tell me how you explain this story?’

‘I don’t attempt to explain it; I don’t think there is anything to explain. I suppose she saw my father going to bed, and when she lost sight of him, he had turned into his own room—my sister had mistaken the position of the door, that’s all. The whole story, to my mind, is much ado about nothing! I only ventured to tell it because you seemed to wish to hear it.’

‘Oh, thank you,’ replied Zeph, eagerly, ‘I am so interested! Of course I see that there is some reason for your explaining away the apparition seen by your sister, for she could not see your father’s ghost when he was still alive, and she might have made a mistake about the situation of his room; but how do you account for what I saw?’

‘You were probably in a highly nervous condition at the time, and had worked yourself up into such a state of excitement that your imagination might readily play you false, and



lead you to suppose that you had seen this figure.'

'Granted that imagination is able to perform such wonders,' said Zeph, doubtfully, 'how could it place before my eyes the figure of a man whom I had never seen, with such absolute fidelity to truth that when I describe him to you you recognise him, and if I were able to draw, I could reproduce each feature with complete accuracy?'

'You had seen a photograph—you mentioned a photograph.'

'I did not see that till next day. I picked out the photograph of your father at once, though it was among some hundreds.'

'Probably, without your remembering the fact, you had turned over the book it was in the night before. Consider what you are taking for granted if the thing did not occur in some natural way such as I suggest. You would believe, and have me believe, that the spirit of my father could once more call back to its use the perishable body it inhabited when

on earth, and besides this, you ask me to believe in ghosts of brown clothes, and black shades, and eyeglasses—and all for what end—for what end? Why, for none whatsoever!’

Zeph’s mind was in a whirl. How could Mr. Blackmore say for no end whatsoever? What right had he thus to decide what might or might not lie within the power of one who had been snatched from earth with a great duty left unfulfilled? Old Mr. Blackmore had gone to Berkhamstead on an important errand. The fate of many hung on words which he alone could utter. He had suddenly been struck down by mortal illness, but during the terrible hours when he lay as it were between two worlds, belonging to neither, who can say how his mind had been tortured by his incapacity to perform the service which none but he could perform? Zeph did not look on these questions as Mr. Blackmore did—to her mind it seemed by no means beyond the bounds of possibility that his father’s spirit might haunt the scene of unfulfilled duty, knowing no rest

until the secret of which he was the sole keeper was laid bare. She had been thinking of this so earnestly that she had forgotten she was keeping the lawyer waiting—when she remembered him, she saw that he was gazing at her with an amused smile. ‘We shall never agree on this subject,’ said she, ‘but you must own it is strange.’

‘Yes, but probably the key to it is lying very close at hand.’

‘That is what I seem to feel,’ said she, flushing with hope; ‘that is what made me so thoughtful.’ But she meant something very different from what he did. He took up his hat, and then Zeph, who saw that all opportunity of learning anything about Daylesford was on the point of vanishing with him, made a great effort, and said nervously, ‘You correspond with Mr. Daylesford; where is he?’

‘He was at Santa Eulalia when he wrote, but was going to Siberia and various parts of Russia; ultimately, I believe, he meant to go to India, and I think Japan.’

‘Will you say I asked about him?’ said Zeph, trying to speak calmly.

‘I will, when I have an opportunity, but I do not expect to hear anything more of him for some months.’

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

‘ I WAS NOT WORTHY—SHE WAS.’

‘ You have taught me  
To be in love with noble thoughts.’—*Old Play.*

‘ THE key to this mystery is probably lying very close at hand.’ Those had been the lawyer’s words, and Zeph felt that they had a strange significance. They chimed in so exactly with certain thoughts which had taken possession of her own mind while Mr. Blackmore was repeating that story of his little sister’s night at the castle. All the time he was speaking, Zeph had felt like one on the verge of a discovery. She was persuaded that materials for this discovery lay all but within her reach if the eyes of her mind could but be opened to perceive them. The ghost—she believed it was a ghost—had appeared to her no doubt as a token that

she was the person appointed to find the papers which would bring such happiness to the Daylesford family, and this thought gave her immeasurable comfort. 'I would give all the world to do it,' she said to herself; 'I might then perhaps venture to go to my dear husband and show him my true heart. Armed with these papers I should have an excuse for going to him, and once in his presence I would humble myself, and I think all would be well.'

From early morning till late night she thought of nothing else. She tried to weave some connection between what had been seen by Mr. Blackmore's little sister and what she herself had seen; and often she felt as if the secret were in her grasp, and then it slipped away from her, and she was left comfortless and hopeless. Thinking so intensely on this one subject kept her from being entirely miserable. Had it not been for the conviction that what had been hidden so long was about to be revealed to her, she would not have known how to hold up her head. It was strange how com-

pletely this had taken possession of her. She sat twisting and turning all she had heard or knew into every possible shape, and calling on Polly and Agnes and Dr. Simonds to help her. She would listen to no discouragement. Dr. Simonds nearly lost her favour because he ridiculed the idea of believing in ghosts; but she found a firm ally in her own father, who stoutly maintained that every great family in England had a well-authenticated ghost story; and that in Holland House, which was within a walk of Lorne Gardens, as well as of Ambassadors' Gate, there were no less than three ghosts under one roof.

Zeph awoke one morning with a strong wish to go to Berkhamstead. She regarded this wish as heaven-sent, and a further proof that she was the chosen agent of discovery.

'Is it open to me to go to the castle for a day or two?' she wrote to Mr. Blackmore. 'I mean, do you suppose my husband would have any objection to my going?' She had written the word husband unawares—she had

not the heart to take another sheet of paper and write more in conformity with the style adopted by the lawyer. 'He no doubt would like me to say—"your client, Mr. Godfrey Daylesford,"' she thought! 'but I cannot bring myself to do it.' A tear fell on the paper; she brushed it away and allowed it no successor. She resumed her letter, and wrote: 'If you feel that I can go there without doing anything contrary to his wishes, will you kindly telegraph to the servants to expect me? I shall take my little brother with me and stay four or five days.' She instructed her servant to wait for an answer. It was, of course, affirmative, so Zeph went to Lorne Gardens to invite Jack. She was so excited with the thought of what she was about to do, that she went into the study without knocking.

'My dear Zeph!' said Mr. Treherne, 'How well you look! How is Godfrey?'

'Edward! Godfrey is abroad; how you do forget things!' exclaimed Mrs. Treherne.



‘Ah, yes, so he is, I forgot; but you have good accounts of him?’

Zeph did not speak; she felt, and always had felt, that it would be cruel to distress her father by telling him the truth.

‘I suppose he will soon be at home again,’ said Mr. Treherne. He did not observe her hesitation.

‘I hope so,’ she answered. ‘I want Jack to go with me to Berkhamstead for a few days. I have seen so little of him lately. I think he will like to go.’

‘Of course he will,’ said her father. ‘Shall you drive there? Do you remember how delightful that drive was?’

‘I am going by train, father,’ Zeph replied hastily. She was afraid of her voice betraying her. ‘I don’t think I could bear to drive.’

‘It would be hot, I daresay,’ said her mother. ‘It was rather cold when we went. Do you remember when we did go? It has escaped my memory.’

‘We went on February 7,’ said Zeph.

‘Oh, how can you remember dates so accurately?’ asked Mrs. Treherne. That date was impressed on Zeph’s memory as no other date had ever been—how could she forget it?

‘Of course she remembers it, Hester,’ observed Mr. Treherne. ‘She might never have been the happy little woman she is now if she had not taken that long drive.’ There was nothing for Zeph to do but go away. Her father knew nothing, but she was not quite so sure about her mother.

‘What a grand lady you are now, Zeph!’ said Jack next day, when they were seated in the carriage which had come to Berkhamstead Station to meet them. ‘Do you recollect that evening when you and I climbed up the railings to see how beautifully Mr. Daylesford’s dinner was set out?’

‘Jack, you must never mention that!’ exclaimed Zeph; even in her grief she was shocked at this recollection. ‘Besides I didn’t climb, so don’t ever say I did; you pulled me up before I knew what you were going to do.’

‘You were always wishing for nice pretty things, Zeph, and now you have got them ; but I believe Polly will be just as happy as you are!’ said Jack, who had always been an inveterate partisan of John Simonds.

‘I sincerely hope dear Polly will be very much happier than ever I have been,’ replied Zeph, fervently.

‘I hope nothing of the kind!’ declared Jack. ‘I want her to be happy, of course ; but I always did like you best.’

As they drove to the castle, Zeph unfolded to Jack the object of her journey. She told him as much about the lost papers as she could, and enlisted his help. Jack had lately been reading one of Edgar Allan Poe’s stories describing a search for a cleverly concealed letter. He wanted to unrip the linings of curtains, and cut to pieces stuffed furniture ; take up floors and peer about for secret passages. His imagination was thoroughly fired, and he was most eager to begin his investigations.

Zeph was alarmed. ‘You may search as

much as you like,' said she, 'but you must injure nothing. Remember it is not our house, and the servants——'

'Do you imagine that the retainers of the family would venture to criticise any of our actions? We are their feudal superiors!' replied Jack, impressively.

When Zeph arrived at the castle, however, she was aware of a subtle something which made her feel that the retainers of the family were well informed as to much that had taken place, and knew that Mr. Godfrey's marriage had turned out a distressing failure. They were scrupulously polite and attentive, and an indifferent person would have seen nothing to justify her belief, but from the moment Zeph set foot in the house she was conscious that she was under the ban of their censure. They knew that she had behaved ill and disapproved of her.

'They may think what they like,' said Zeph to herself. 'I don't care. I have not come here to trouble myself about them. I have

something to do that is really important!' What was that something to be? Her heart died within her when she thought how entirely unprovided she was with an answer to this question. She remembered all that her husband had told her of the thoroughness of the search which had been conducted by him. She would, however, bring her woman's wits to bear on the matter, and would go into every room in turn and examine places likely to have escaped a man's observation. She began that very day, and with Jack's help took out every drawer of every cabinet and writing-table, and looked behind each for papers which might have slipped out of sight. No possible hiding-place escaped her. Next day it was the same, and then they went into the library. Godfrey had told her how systematically the books had been examined, but she was quite sure that no man would examine books with as much patience as a woman would bring to the task.

A weary task it was! That day and the

next they looked into the books and they looked behind them, but they never found what they wanted. All this work was not done without the housekeeper seeing and quickly divining what they were about. 'It is nothing but a waste of work, ma'am!' said she; 'there is not a square inch of the whole castle that has not already been well examined at least half a dozen times by at least half a dozen people.'

'Never mind, Mrs. Sanderson,' said Zeph, doggedly, 'I have such a wish to try what I can do!'

'Of course if you have a wish, ma'am—but it will be no use,' said Mrs. Sanderson, oracularly. 'When those papers are found it will be because it is intended that they should be found. No looking will do any good!' and so saying she departed. Zeph greatly feared that she was right, and yet the only thing that she now seemed able to do for Godfrey was not to let herself be daunted by any fatigue or discouragement, but to proceed with her search

strenuously. She was utterly weary, but her excitement prevented her from knowing it. On the fifth day of unremitting labour, she remembered Jack. 'Dear Jack, you must be tired to death!' said she.

'Perhaps I am when I begin to think about it,' said he, 'but what matter if we have the glory of finding what no one else has been able to find!'

'Jack, I begin to be very much afraid!' said Zeph, sadly. 'When the long bookcase at the end of the room has been looked through, we shall have nothing left to do. Go out, dear; I can do all that remains. I have been very selfish to keep you indoors all this time.'

They had been five days at the Castle and had never once gone out. Zeph did not want to go out, or to see anything. If she had not come with one paramount object, nothing would have induced her to revisit a place where there was so much to make her miserable. Jack went out, and she continued her task alone, and late in the afternoon turned

over the pages of the last book and knew that all chance of success was over. She had failed in her search, and would have to go home next day as she came, carrying with her the knowledge that she had thrown away the happiness of her life by indulging in stupid, ill-tempered, mad jealousy. She sat on the steps in the library in a state of complete despondency. Something had emphatically told her she should succeed, and yet here she was—alone, disappointed, and profoundly miserable. No words, too, could express her self-contempt and remorse. She loved Godfrey—and she had driven him away for ever. He was not likely to return for years, and he could never, either now or at any period of his life, look on her as anything but a perverse, unloving, selfish, suspicious creature, whom he had married because he loved her, and who had repaid him by ruining his life.

Jack came back late in the afternoon and found her sitting looking pale and discomfited. 'Found it?' was on the tip of his tongue as he



opened the library door, but it was enough to look at her. He himself was in great spirits. 'I have been to the rectory,' said he; 'old Scatch is away with mother Scatch, but some of the boys are there. Old Scatch has gone to look at a living which has been offered to him. Benson says Mr. Daylesford has got some one to offer it to old Scatch, and he is very likely going to take it, Benson thinks. You know Benson, Zeph; he held up your what's-his-name at your wedding—I mean helped me to do it, for I was, of course, more of a principal person than he? Don't look so miserable, Zeph; we will have that paper yet!'

After dinner Jack made her go out; he said it was awfully jolly out in the garden, and to please him Zeph let herself be taken the same round that she had so often taken with Godfrey. They walked by the fading light through the solitary garden paths, and she thought how happy she might have been. That night when she went to bed an idea occurred to her which comforted her a little.

She was walking through the long gallery where she had seen 'the little brown gentleman,' when this idea came to her. She had seen him on February 7—the day of Mr. Blackmore's death—and on the night of February 7 next year she would watch in that gallery again, and if that apparition appeared she would speak to it, and follow it, even if it cost her her life. She knew that she was a poor weak girl, but for love of Godfrey she could nerve herself to do so much as that.

'I hate going home beaten,' said Jack, next day. 'It was so jolly when we came here, for we felt as if we were going to do such a lot. Don't look like that, Zeph!'

Zeph did her best not to 'look like that,' but she felt utterly crushed, and though when she was at home again she made a brave struggle to resume her usual way of life, she could resume nothing but the sorrow and suffering that now seemed to have made their own of her. 'I am quite well, thank you,' said she, when asked how she was; 'there is

nothing to be anxious about.' She did not like to be asked how she was, or noticed in any way, and generally took a book and pretended to read. Both her doctors were now more concerned about her than before. They wished her to go from home, to travel, to do anything in fact that might shake off the weight of depression that seemed to be settling down on her; but she refused to leave home. She seemed to rouse herself a little when Polly's marriage took place, but she soon relapsed into her usual condition. Sometimes Agnes stayed with her, but more usually Zeph preferred to be alone.

One evening about nine, she was told that a person was in the breakfast-room who particularly desired to see her. 'But who is she?' asked Mrs. Daylesford.

'It is a lady, ma'am—at least, I think she is a lady. She says she wishes to speak to you on a matter of extreme importance.'

'Why do you let people of this kind into the house, Charles?' said Mrs. Daylesford, fret-

fully. 'You surely ought to know that she has only come here to beg.'

'I don't think she has, ma'am—at least, if she has, it is Dr. Simonds who has sent her, or advised her to come.'

'Then why didn't you tell me so at once?' said Zeph. 'Bring her here, please.' And then she thought, 'Perhaps it is that poor girl who is a model, Juliet—Juliet Meyrick—I will be kind to her if it is, for I did her a great injustice.'

The footman soon returned ushering in tall graceful lady dressed in dark grey, whose face was almost hidden by a veil. Zeph rose to receive her. She stood hesitating by the door. Then she spoke, and Zeph immediately became aware that this was Hester Langdale; but she felt no repugnance to the sight of her—to wish to escape from what was about to be said—something in the speaker's voice and manner conquered her at once.

'Forgive me for thus intruding,' said Hester, coming rather nearer, but pausing at a

little distance from Mrs. Daylesford, who was standing with one hand resting on a chair by her side; ‘I hope you will forgive me; my hope is to be of service to you. Dr. Simonds has talked of you very often lately, and has told me of your desire to be the means of discovering the papers which are so important to your husband and his family. Dr. Simonds told me of the appearance seen by you in the long gallery at Berkhamstead Castle, and also of what occurred to Mr. Blackmore’s little daughter. I have thought a great deal about everything that he has told me. I seem to have spent night after night in thinking of nothing else. And at last I think I have perhaps hit upon a solution of what you both saw, which, with the addition of a fragment of evidence I myself am able to supply, may possibly help you to put your husband in the way of finding what has baffled him so long.’

Zeph’s heart stood still—it was too good to be true. Then just because she wished for this so much, a slight feeling of mistrust took

possession of her, and she said, 'Why do you wish to give this information to me?'

Hester wavered a little. Mrs. Daylesford's words seemed almost cruel. She could say all that seemed necessary in a methodical, straightforward manner, but when suddenly checked, or made to see that she was acting in a very unusual way, her courage failed her at once. 'To whom should I give it,' she answered sadly, 'if not to you? Dr. Simonds ridicules me for seeming to recognise the existence of ghosts—he would not listen to me for a moment. If I had not come to you I must have kept this to myself—I might, perhaps, have gone to your lawyer, but——' and here she seemed to take courage. 'But I am not speaking truly—I had another reason for coming to you; if I tell it to you I entreat you not to be angry with me, or pained—I seemed to gather from what Dr. Simonds said that you were ill and unhappy—very unhappy, and that some difference had arisen between you and some one dear to you, and it seemed

to me that if I could come to you and persuade you to listen to certain fancies which have come into my head, and to act on certain suggestions which I wish to make, that perhaps I might be doing you a service—and doing him one too, for no doubt he is as unhappy as you. That is all,' said Hester, humbly, 'that is what made me venture to come.'

'You are very good!' exclaimed Zeph, warmly. 'No! good does not half express it. You are very generous, and I am unworthy of——'

'Let me tell you what I think,' interrupted Hester, and it seemed as if she were in great fear of her courage giving way. 'Let me tell you all, and you shall judge whether I am right in being so sanguine of success. I earnestly trust that I am not comforting myself with a vain hope and misleading you.'

'But do sit down,' said Zeph, giving her a chair, for up to this time the two girls had been standing, and Zeph, who was so nervous that she was scarcely able to keep her feet, had

little doubt that Hester was feeling as she did. Tears rose to Hester's eyes, but she recovered herself in a moment. 'Thank you,' she said, with a slight shiver of dismay. 'I will not sit—I had rather not—I could not—I am only going to stay a moment, only until I have told you what I came to say.'

Zeph, full of pity for her, advanced a little nearer. Hester said nervously, 'Take no notice of me, I entreat you. Let me say what I wish to tell you—I must do it in a businesslike manner, or I cannot do it at all. Dr. Simonds said that when you were at Berkhamstead, on the anniversary of Mr. Blackmore's death, you chanced to be in the long gallery about midnight, and you saw an old gentleman dressed in brown, and wearing a shade over the left eye, coming, candle in hand, along the gallery towards you, and that you, thinking he was a visitor to the castle, and knowing that you were in a fancy dress which would seem strange to him, drew back a little till he passed, but that he suddenly disappeared, and you, after



speaking of this at breakfast next morning, and receiving some explanation which seemed sufficient, thought no more of what you had seen.'

'That is quite true. I was easily led to believe that I had seen an old friend of the family, and I always did think so until some little time ago when I had a visit from the present Mr. Blackmore, and was so startled by the likeness between him and the gentleman I had seen in the gallery, that I made enquiries of him. Ah! what a great deal of disappointment this caused me, for I began to think that the apparition in the gallery would lead to the discovery of the secret.'

'So it will, I hope; I believe it has put the clue in my hands.'

'In *your* hands!' exclaimed Zeph, with exquisite pain, and then she bowed her head and thought, 'I was not worthy to do it; *she* was.'

'Yes,' said Hester, 'I think so. I hope so. Let me go on. Your lawyer told you that his

sister when young had gone through an experience of the same kind, only it took place during her father's lifetime.'

'Yes,' replied Zeph, 'he said so—that was what puzzled me. Why should she see her father's ghost while he was still alive?'

'That is what gave me the clue,' said Hester, 'not at first, but after some thought. His little sister saw her father walking through the gallery, and he suddenly disappeared. I take that to mean that he was actually there. He had gone down to the castle on business; and late at night, when he expected the whole household to be asleep, he visited some secret hiding-place where these important papers were kept. When he disappeared he had pressed a spring, and entered some secret door. That was the reason of his disappearance. The figure she saw was her own father. It was very different with you—at least I think so. You may consider me superstitious, but you know the circumstances under which the poor old gentleman died. I cannot help thinking

that you saw his ghost paying a midnight visit to the place which he was about to visit when he died.'

'I do believe there is something in it!' said Zeph, trembling with excitement, 'I never thought of this myself—I never should have thought of it; but you said you had other proof.'

'Yes,' replied Hester, speaking with much effort, for this was a personal matter, 'I have, I trust, more proof. Some years ago, Mr. Godfrey Daylesford gave me a small embroidered velvet blotting-book. It had been cut open in the search for papers. Some papers were found between the velvet and the boards, but it was considered that they had only been put there to wedge out the embroidery, for after they had been exposed to heat, and experimented on with various acids, they were regarded as valueless and left in the case. They were, for the most part, sheets of blank paper, but one had a kind of rough plan on it, and on re-examining it, after hearing what Dr. Simonds told

me, I have come to the conclusion that it may be a plan of the long gallery and the rooms opening out of it, and there is a something indicated by lines of shading, which may be a narrow passage, and if so, it perhaps leads to a secret chamber which may be the place where the papers were kept.' Here, Hester, who had not come to that house or into Zeph's presence without a violent effort, broke down and burst into tears, but she struggled with herself and tried to say more. Zeph was by her side in a moment, and took her hand, saying, 'God for ever bless you, Hester Langdale, for what you have done now! I know why you have done it, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. If you had not been good and generous, you would not have come here. You know that I and——' But here Zeph paused, she could not add what she had meant to add, 'that Godfrey and I are parted, and you are trying to reconcile us.'

'Go to the castle with an architect,' said Hester, 'and see if there is any ground for

what I have imagined, and you had better have Mr. Blackmore with you, for he will take charge of the papers if you are so fortunate as to be successful.' Hester was hurrying through what remained to do, for her strength was failing fast.

'Oh no, no, I cannot do that; there is a coldness about these professional men which simply kills me. If I went there with them and found nothing, I should be ill.'

'You ought to have help. This secret hiding-place must be very well concealed, or it would have been found years ago. I hope this is the plan, but I am sure no one but an architect can understand it.'

'I will go to Mr. Blackmore in the morning and ask him to hold himself in readiness to come to Berkhamstead with an architect next day—but I must have a little time to look about before they come—I must see if there is any such place as you think. Let me go alone first—I shall be better prepared for disappointment if I do.'

‘Here is the plan, then,’ said Hester, handing her the blotting-book.

‘But you are giving me the whole thing!’ said Zeph. ‘I need not have the case—the plan is quite enough for me.’

‘Take all,’ replied Hester, gently, ‘it is more in its place in your hands than in mine. And now I will go. I must thank you for listening to me so kindly, and request you, if you succeed, never to let any one know that I have done anything to help you.’

‘Oh, don’t ask that—it would be most unjust—your goodness must not remain unknown!’

‘I entreat you to yield to my wish. I could not bear to have my name mentioned, or my poor share in the discovery discussed. You may say that I gave you the blotting-book if you are obliged to say anything, but avoid it if you can, and you must say no more. Promise me this, or you will give me pain.’

‘I promise,’ said Zeph, ‘but I would much rather tell the truth. I ought to tell it—you

have been so good and noble. As long as I live, whether the papers are found or not, and whatever happens, I shall be grateful to you.'

'Don't praise me! don't thank me! You have been very kind to me, and I feel your kindness!' said Hester, fervently, and she turned to leave the room.

'Ah, you are going, and I can do nothing,' said Zeph. She could not bear to see her go thus, and hurrying to her side, took her hand and said, 'God bless you! Thank you once more. I would give anything to be as good as you are!'

## CHAPTER XXXV.

IT IS A THING ON WHICH I HAVE SET MY HEART.

This day

Shall change all griefs and quarrels into love.—*Henry V.*

ZEPH was at Mr. Blackmore's office next morning before he himself arrived there. Her horses were impatiently pawing the ground, and she was impatiently walking backwards and forwards to make the time of waiting seem shorter. 'I want to go back to Berkhamstead,' said she, the moment she saw him, 'I suppose there can be no objection—you must let me go—I shall not stay so long as I did before, I hope, and I want to go this morning.'

Mr. Blackmore was astonished at the change in her appearance. She was not like the same person. She held her head erect, and her eyes were bright with renewed hope. When he had



taken her into his room and heard as much as she chose to tell him of the circumstances which had wrought such a change, he felt it his duty to crush this hope at once. 'I am sorry to say anything to damp you,' said he, 'but if you had the least idea of the character of the search instituted by the two Mr. Daylesfords, my clients, you would not for one moment entertain the hope of succeeding where they failed.'

'I have heard something of it. Mrs. Sanderson told me last time I was there, that there was not one square inch in the castle which had not been thoroughly examined at least half a dozen times, by at least half a dozen people.'

'She told you the truth. No search could have been more exhaustive.'

'Did you look for secret chambers?'

'Secret chambers rarely exist, except in novels; but we did look for them, and had there been any at Berkhamstead we must have found them.'

'Oh, but, Mr. Blackmore, I have a plan

which seems to point to the existence of something of the kind. It may not be a room, but it is certainly a passage, and surely there would not be a passage unless it led somewhere. I know that part of the castle so well that I am quite certain no one knows of the existence of any passage in the place in which it is marked in the plan.'

In spite of himself the lawyer was slightly startled. 'May I see this plan?' he asked eagerly.

'If I show it to you will you promise not to take the task of looking for this room out of my hands? I wish to be the one to make the discovery—it is a thing on which I have set my heart. You must arrange for me to go there with my brother, and to stay till I either succeed, or give up all hope—I don't want you to come until I summon you.'

'Your wishes shall be respected,' said the lawyer, bowing. 'But there is one condition which I must make—I cannot allow you to interfere with the fabric of the castle—no walls

must be pulled down unless I am there to sanction it.'

'Of course not!' replied Zeph, 'it will not be necessary. I should not think of doing such a thing; I will show you the plan.'

He got up to ring the bell to send some one to the carriage for it—he expected to see a large imposing-looking roll of paper backed with linen for protection, and was wholly unprepared to see Mrs. Daylesford take out her purse and look in one of its pockets for half a sheet of note-paper which she had folded up small and placed there. That was the plan! There was nothing but a few rough lines made by a quill-pen—a child might have done it as an amusement. He thought she had taken leave of her senses. 'There is nothing even to show that this has anything to do with Berk-hampstead Castle,' said he, coldly; 'any one of us who were engaged in the search might have had this paper in his hands a hundred times, and have laid it down each time as a thing of no possible use or value.'

‘You did have it in your hands! All of you had it, and you all laid it down as valueless! This may not be the clue, but any of you may have had the real clue in your hands just as often, and have refused to see any importance in it. I may do no good when I am there, but I want to go, and you must let me do it, and remember that you have promised not to come to me until I summon you.’

‘My dear Mrs. Daylesford, there is nothing here to make me wish to reopen the search—nothing; I remember it now, perfectly. I should not think of going. You are too sanguine—you are preparing a great disappointment for yourself. Why should this scrawl—for it is little more—be Berkhamstead rather than any other place? It is only a scrap of paper that was used as padding.’

‘Ostensibly it was, but that may have been to hide it more securely. You say it is not Berkhamstead, but it is. It is meant for the long gallery and the rooms opening out of it. Though it is only a scrawl, I can see that.

This is my bed-room—look, there are the three windows at the end of it which look out on the garden. Next comes a large room which the housekeeper said was not used because it wanted refurnishing; the secret room is on one side of it—that is, if I am right—and after that the rooms my father and mother had. The secret room seems only to be a long slip between them.’

‘It is such a slip that it is no room at all, it looks like nothing but a little thickening of the wall by a bad draughtsman. A person willing to see, can see anything he likes in a scrawl of this description. It might just as easily be explained into being a plan of this office.’

Zeph sighed.

‘I can give you another reason why this cannot be what you think—a reason fatal to your theory.’

‘Let me hear it—tell me quickly,’ this time she feared what he said was the fact.

‘The papers were concealed by Mr. Daylesford. He wished them to be kept in

safety, but in some place where his father could never find them. If there was a secret room, the father would be quite as well aware of its existence as the son, and if they had been placed there the old man might have found them at any moment.'

'I am not convinced,' replied Zeph; 'it sounds convincing, but it is not. The Earl was a very old man, he might have forgotten that there was such a place, and his son might have known that he had—most likely he did. Anyhow, Lord Berkhamstead would never go to it. Why should he? Such places are dangerous, they are not safe for old people, there was nothing to take him to it. I expect that Mr. Daylesford locked them up in some strong box and left them there in all confidence.'

'You are mistaken,' said Mr. Blackmore, and yet, though his words were still incredulous and scornful, he had become very grave and thoughtful, and he stood gazing at the plan as if he had more belief in it than he was prepared to admit. 'I cannot help fancying that I have

seen this plan somewhere or other very recently,' said he,—'since I saw it in Mr. Cyril Daylesford's blotting-book, I mean.'

'Perhaps your father had a duplicate copy. If I am right, and it is what I think, your father would be very likely to have one.'

'Oh no, he had nothing of the kind, it is only a fancy of mine that I have seen it,' said he, giving her the sheet of paper.

'My train goes at eleven,' said she, 'I must leave you. I have two or three things to do before I go.'

'Remember! No pulling down of walls,' said he, with a smile of benevolent superiority.

'None! You will come at once, if I telegraph for you?'

'Oh, certainly I will. I will come without fail,' said he, still smiling.

'I really mean what I say,' said Mrs. Daylesford—she was afraid that he did not. He persisted in mocking her enterprise. 'You must let no business here in London prevent you.'

‘Nothing shall prevent me! If you telegraph for me, madam, I shall consider that you have made some discovery so important that every other engagement shall give way to my business with you. I repeat, emphatically, nothing shall prevent me.’

Zeph felt sobered at once. How could he speak so? Had he forgotten his father, and what had come to prevent him? She was just leaving the room when he said, ‘Let me give you one caution; in the, I fear, highly improbable event of your finding the evidence that has been lost so long, be careful to place it where there is no possibility of its being tampered with—or, better still, make no examination of it until trustworthy witnesses are with you.’

‘I never thought of making any examination at all,’ said Zeph. ‘You shall do that. All I propose to do while I am alone is to ascertain whether there is a concealed room or not. As soon as I am sure of that, I shall send for you and wait.’



Mr. Blackmore could not help smiling at himself as he went back to his dingy room after taking Mrs. Daylesford to her carriage. He had actually at last been so led away by her confident manner, that he had begun to speak as if success were possible, whereas he was perfectly convinced that there was not the remotest prospect of it. He knew what had been done at Berkhamstead already, and did not believe that it was in mortal power to do more. As for secret chambers, they were part of the properties of the Minerva Press, and the plan which had affected Mrs. Daylesford's imagination so much was apparently the work of a child. He was very busy, and had mighty little time to think of the absurd imaginings of 'a pretty, but empty-headed woman.' They were absurd, and every time he had a moment's leisure he told himself so, and yet all through that morning, while he was mentally pooh-poohing what was making her so happy, a curious undercurrent of memory was at work in his mind, and late in the afternoon, it

gathered force enough to make him exclaim, 'I believe I have it!' He was now sure that he had seen that plan, or its counterpart, within the last twelve months, and he knew where. It must have been among some papers of his father's. He took a key and opened a drawer in a writing-table which had been his father's, and after some search he found a twin plan, Line for line, so far as he could remember, it exactly resembled that which Mrs. Daylesford had shown him. He was so startled that he turned cold. 'How that woman will exult over us all,' he thought, 'if she succeeds where we failed! And I really do believe she will! It begins to look as if she had got hold of the key to the mystery at last!' Many hours before he found his father's copy of the plan, Zeph had lost hers. The station at Euston was crowded, and some deft pickpocket stole her purse with perfect ease and safety. She never missed it, and went on her way buoyed up by the possession of the paper.

'My advice,' said Jack, 'is that before we

begin to eat our luncheon or do anything else, we go into the long gallery and get to know exactly what it is like, and then we shall get to know what things are likely to seem hard to us, and can think how best to manage them while we seem to be doing nothing.'

'That's a good idea,' replied Zeph, cheerily; 'let us go.'

'We may get to know where that door is likely to be—perhaps it is behind some large piece of furniture.'

'I don't believe that there is any large piece of furniture—in fact, I am sure there isn't.'

They went upstairs at once. The walls of the gallery were lined with panelled oak, and not only was there no doorway visible, but the panelling was so made that it was at once evident that no cunningly concealed doorway could exist.

'Don't you see, Zeph, that there can't be a secret door,' said Jack. 'If there was one it would have to be cut through the middle

of one of these panels and every one would see it.'

Zeph saw that he was right and that the panelling was so arranged that concealment was out of the question. And yet if there was the slip of a room or passage indicated on her plan, there must be some way of getting into it. 'I will look at the plan,' said she, 'that will no doubt give us some hint.'

Then she discovered her loss, and was so cast down that she could eat no luncheon. 'It looks as if fate were dead against us,' said she.

'Nonsense!' said Jack. 'Don't you be down-hearted. It's vexing, but that's all, and there will be more honour and glory for us if we succeed without it. I'll go and get the key of that room they keep locked. We will look there.' The shut-up room was a large, dull-looking apartment between that which Zeph had always occupied, and that in which her father and mother had slept. There was no reason for its being shut up except that the hangings of the bed and coverings of the chairs

and sofas had grown shabby. It would not have been shut up if the castle had been occupied, but there were more rooms already than were ever wanted, and this was not to be used until it was refurnished. It was an oppressively dull-looking room, and though Zeph and Jack had examined it as they had examined every other place when last they were there, it looked as if the door had not been open for years. Alas, this time also they found nothing to reward their pains, though they tapped the walls on every side.

‘How wide the walls are!’ observed Jack, when he was locking the door again. They were wide. Zeph was in the gallery, and Jack close by her in this deeply recessed doorway which was big enough to make a tolerably good closet. It was the only door in the gallery which stood so far back.

‘I’ll tell you what I think,’ said Jack, ‘when you fancied you saw a ghost, some fellow was just hiding in here—there is room enough to hide, and no one who was a little farther along

the gallery would see him. How far off were you?’

‘Oh, don’t waste time on that,’ replied Zeph; ‘the person I saw did not hide—he was too old and grave to play stupid tricks, and he could not have gone into the room, for the door was always locked then just as it is now—Godfrey told me so.’

They looked through the other rooms—they tapped the walls of the gallery to see if they covered hollow spaces, they did everything that their ingenuity suggested, but nowhere could they find the slightest indication of a door.

‘We are going to be disappointed again, Jack,’ exclaimed Zeph; ‘I felt that we were when I found my plan was gone! It seems a thousand times harder to bear this time!’

They dined, and then went back to the gallery to practise some newly thought of devices, but darkness came and found them as far from the wished-for knowledge as ever. They were both thoroughly weary, and one of them was well-nigh broken-hearted.

‘Come and sit down and rest,’ said Jack, taking his sister’s hand and leading her away. They went into the bright and comfortable room which was waiting to receive them, but Zeph could feel nothing beyond a cruel sense of disappointment. She sat close by Jack—he was all she had now, and she liked to have him near her, but was too miserable to speak to him. At last they went to bed. They were too much dispirited to say, ‘To-morrow we will begin afresh.’ They both meant to do it, but only as a forlorn hope.

Zeph could not sleep. She was too unhappy to close her eyes. She lay still thinking of each successive event in her short, sad, and most disappointing life.

About two o’clock an idea suddenly took forcible possession of her mind: ‘Why was that one doorway set so far back? Why was it so different from all the others? And why did the wall seem so much thicker there than anywhere else? The wall which ran along the side of the gallery was a good substantial one

—she could judge of its thickness by what she saw at the entrance of all the other rooms ; but nowhere in the gallery did it present such an appearance as in the disused bed-room. Suppose the secret door were placed in the paneling on one side of the doorway? She lit a candle and got up, put on her dressing-gown, and went to look at this doorway which had suddenly become so interesting to her. She was rather afraid of the gallery, but it would have been perfectly impossible to her to delay the search till morning. A glance showed her that there was just room for a door in the wall between the door of the disused bed-room and the gallery. Another glance showed her that the oak-panelling was arranged rather differently. And yet, after all, it was arranged in the only way that was practicable in such a narrow space. There were two oblong panels, one set above another. Both sides of the doorway were alike. Her recollection of the plan she had lost made her turn to the side nearest to the room in which her father and



mother had slept. Perhaps if she could but find a spring, or the trick of setting some machinery in motion, the whole of one side of the doorway would open, and such a door, if it existed, would certainly never be suspected by a passer-by. Where was this spring? What was it? Two oblong panels, with plain but deeply cut mouldings, do not present much opportunity for hiding elaborate springs. She pushed the centre of one panel—then that of the other—then of the two together. After this she put her hands on the mouldings and tried to push them up or down, sometimes together and sometimes apart—next she tried to push them sideways. Nothing stirred. Finally, after a long time spent in vain attempts of all kinds, she touched a small round bit of metal, concealed at the top of the moulding of the upper panel. It was not bigger than the head of a large nail. To her inexpressible delight she found that this could be pressed down. She did press it down, but it produced no effect. She was by no means daunted by

this, more especially as she found that there was no such knob above the moulding on the other side of the way. She began to go through all the operations she had already tried with no result, but this time she combined them with holding down the little knob. She put her hand to the moulding, once more pushed it laterally in the direction of the bedroom, pressed down the knob at the same time, and almost to her horror—for the result was so immediate and un hoped for—the panelling slipped noiselessly away and she saw a black cavity before her. She leaned against the door of the bed-room, and struggled with a disposition to faint. She soon overcame this, and took her candle to look, but could see nothing but a long and very narrow passage with an arched roof, cut in the thickness of the wall. She dared not enter it alone, and hurried breathlessly away to fetch Jack. He was sleeping soundly, and looked so young, so beautiful, and so happily removed from the troubles and anxieties which were afflicting her, that she had

not the heart to awaken him, for she knew how weary he was. 'If I love Godfrey, I ought to be able to venture into that place,' she thought. 'I will just see if it leads anywhere, and then go back to bed.' Animated by this thought, she returned to the gallery, entered the narrow passage, and, with a certain amount of trepidation, walked a few paces forward. She was checked by finding herself at the top of a long and very steep flight of steps which seemed to lead down to unknown depths. In still greater alarm she ventured to descend these, holding by the rough walls and scratching her hands against them as she went. The air felt colder and more chill each step she took. Finally, she reached the bottom and found a door, which she opened. It led into a long and narrow space too small to be called a room, and scarcely wider than an ordinary passage. The walls were bare, and there was no furniture but an old writing-table, on which stood a strong-looking box of black oak, clamped with iron. She remembered her promise and did

not attempt to open it, but a feeling of overpowering joy and gratitude took possession of her, for there, surely, must be the papers. She dropped on her knees to return thanks for heaven's bounty to her. She went close to the table, but forbore even to touch the box. She was firmly resolved that she would be in a position to tell the lawyer that she had not attempted to open it. Then she looked around. On one side there was a rusty grate, on the other a curious blurred light which was produced by the dim grey light of early morning struggling through a dense screen of ivy which entirely covered the outside of the window. Uttering mute but passionate prayers that the box might contain what her husband wanted, Zeph stole back to the gallery. She was able to close the door; all trace of her discovery was removed, and now none but herself knew that secret. She felt the danger of this, went to her room, and wrote to her husband: 'If I die to-night, Godfrey, before I am able to tell any one what I have discovered, this paper will

inform you that the passage leading to the secret room is near the entrance to the room which is now never used.' Then followed a minute description of the spot and directions for opening the door, after which she added, 'I wish you, my dear husband, to know that I entirely loved and honoured you, and desired your forgiveness more than anything else on earth.' That done, she went to bed. She was more happy than tongue can tell.

By five o'clock she had roused the servants and had sent off one of them on horseback to summon Mr. Blackmore. At eight she went to Jack's little bed and awoke him that he might hear the great news. His eyes looked so large and he stared at his sister with so much admiration, that she soon saw what he thought of the magnitude of her achievement. 'I hope you have sent for old Mr. Blackmore?' said he.

Zeph was alarmed. 'Jack! Jack!' said she, 'for Heaven's sake, don't say that! Don't say "old Mr. Blackmore," for fear the real old one appears! Get up and come down, I have had

no sleep and am so hungry. What shall we do till that man arrives ? ’

She went into the breakfast-room, and was startled by finding Mrs. Scatcherd there. ‘ You did not expect to see me, dear Mrs. Daylesford,’ said she. ‘ I happened to hear of your being here, and as I was away when you were here last time I came at once. That dear angel of a husband of yours has got the Crown to give us a living. I believe he asked for one for us twelve months ago. We are going to leave this place at once. We are done with all the boys we have been training up in the way they ought to go so long ; they may go where they like now, and turn out just as they choose. How lovely you look, my dear ! How do you think I am bearing all the wear and tear I have been enduring lately ? ’

‘ You are bearing it splendidly ! You look charming,’ replied Zeph, who knew what was expected of her.

‘ Ah ! You always were a dear good girl, and your husband always was a dear kind man,

and the only thing which makes me not like to accept this living the Crown has just given us, is leaving you and him and having to pay that eighty pounds they always do get out of you when they give you a Crown living. And that reminds me—one of the things which brought me here so early this morning is that I want to know if Dr. Scatcherd and L, and the dear children, of course, can come and stay here for a week or so, while our furniture is being moved to our new home? You see it is quite impossible for us to be in the rectory here when once our furniture is taken away, and it is impossible for us to be in the rectory the Crown has given us, until the furniture has been unpacked and put in its place there; so I thought as your husband had got us the living, you, dear, might like to do something kind for us, too, and would take us in while you are here. It would be very pleasant for us to be with you, and much more comfortable than any other arrangement.'

'It is Mr. Blackmore who settles things of

this kind, not I,' replied Zeph; 'I have to ask him when I want to come myself. He will be here this morning—I have sent for him. Oh, what is this? Mrs. Scatcherd, do excuse me.'

A servant had given her a note, and to her surprise it was from Mr. Blackmore himself. 'Dear Madam,' he wrote, 'I have found a paper which seems to my mind to support your theory so strongly that I feel it my duty, in the interest of my clients, to be on the spot. I left London last night, by the late train, and have slept at the village inn here, but I earnestly request you to make no objection to my coming to the house. If anything should be discovered, extreme pains should be taken to have witnesses present who can testify to the circumstances under which the documents are found. Doubts may be cast on their validity unless this is attended to. You will see this as I do, and pardon my apparent disregard of your wishes. The paper I have found materially alters the aspect of affairs.'

'Go to Mr. Blackmore and request him to



come here without a moment's delay,' said Mrs. Daylesford, eagerly; 'say that I have already despatched a messenger to town on the same errand.'

'Ah, Mr. Blackmore will be here then, directly,' exclaimed Mrs. Scatcherd. 'That is nice! I shall have an excellent opportunity for arranging with him about our little visit, as you say he is to be asked;' and so saying, she slowly settled down into the easiest chair in the room.

'I am afraid that I must ask you to leave me alone with Mr. Blackmore,' said Zeph; 'I have to talk with him on important business!'

'Then will you arrange with him about our coming here?' said Mrs. Scatcherd.

'Yes, I will arrange with him,' replied Zeph, who was ready to promise anything if she would but go away. And thus Mrs. Scatcherd departed, then, as ever, compassing her own ends.

Before Zeph had half finished her breakfast, Mr. Blackmore came. He entered the room

briskly. 'I have found a plan!' he said joyously; but Zeph interrupted him.

'I have lost one!' said she. 'My pocket was picked; but that is of no consequence, not the least. Come upstairs, I have something to show you.'

The lawyer had no idea her success had been so decided, and said, in a commonplace way, while going upstairs, 'Was there much in it?'

'In what?' asked Zeph.

'In your purse.'

'Twenty pounds, perhaps; why do you ask? How can you think of such things as that?'

She took him to the secret door—secret no longer—she opened it, and was about to enter; but he drew her back and made the butler and the housekeeper come, and then in a strong body they went, one by one, along that dark and narrow passage, and down those steps which were obscure even when lighted by three candles. Mr. Blackmore was now as excited as Zeph herself. Jack, who had followed them, was the most collected of the party. 'There,'

exclaimed Zeph, 'is the oak box! I saw it when I came in early this morning, but I remembered your instructions, and did not even touch it.'

'Touch it now, madam,' said he; 'this is your discovery, and you, in our presence, shall examine the contents.'

Trembling with anxiety, she tried to raise the lid, but the box was locked. Mr. Blackmore, however, had brought with him some keys he had found in his father's desk, and the first which Zeph tried—a little odd-looking key with an old-fashioned handle—turned in the lock at once. The box contained some papers, and they carried it into the corridor to examine them by daylight.

'Will you do it, Mr. Blackmore?' said Zeph, 'my poor hands tremble so, I can do nothing.'

So the lawyer took her place, and she and the two servants silently watched him lift out the papers which might mean so much.

'Victory!' he cried, 'Victory!' waving a

dingy paper in triumph. ‘How I wish my dear clients had been here! Mr. Marmaduke and Mr. Godfrey Daylesford ought to have been here! This is the certificate of their father’s marriage with Miss Janet Murray. I now see what has made the discovery so difficult. We have all believed that they were married in Austria, or somewhere on the continent—we were always told so, in fact—but it seems that they came home to their own country for the ceremony. They were married at Reeth on May 14, 18—, just two years before Mr. Marmaduke’s birth. I do not wonder that the register was never found. Reeth is in Yorkshire—it is an out-of-the-way place now, but at the time of their marriage it must have been well-nigh inaccessible. I remember hearing that the people in the villages near went on praying for George III. until William IV. was on the throne—so they were not likely to know how much that register was wanted—but here is a copy of it, and any one who doubts its authenticity can go and consult the register for

himself. Now that I know where to find it—now that we know where the marriage took place—I shall go at once. I will go this very evening, but this is sufficient to establish all that my clients have been wanting to establish so long—Mr. Marmaduke Daylesford is, as his brother always said he was, Earl of Berkhamstead, and he will find it perfectly easy to prove his claim. It is you, madam,’ said the lawyer, turning to Zeph, ‘it is you who, under Providence, have been the means of reinstating him in his rights! He might have lived and died without ever having his claim recognised if it had not been for your great sagacity, your most remarkable perseverance and patience under discouragement (to my shame I own that I discouraged you myself), and your untiring devotion to your husband’s interests.’

‘Oh, Mr. Blackmore, I don’t deserve that,’ said Zeph, ‘I have done a little—a very little; but some one else, to whom I shall be for ever grateful, has done much more.’

Had it not been for her, I could have done nothing.'

'I don't know, madam,' exclaimed Mrs. Sanderson, 'I am very sure no human being could have worked harder! I shouldn't have liked to slave so myself!'

'I don't know, either,' said Mr. Blackmore, 'but I feel as if our success was entirely due to you, and I am certain that no event could possibly have occurred which could give your husband more satisfaction—more happiness, I ought to say—than this.'

Was Zeph entirely changed? Something had just been said which, in former days, would have offended and pained her deeply. Mr. Blackmore had affirmed that no event could possibly have occurred which would afford her husband more happiness than this. It was evident, therefore, that in the lawyer's estimation reconciliation with his wife occupied quite a secondary place in Godfrey's mind. Zeph never so much as observed this, for her whole attention was given to a circumstance

which filled her with delight—Mr. Blackmore had begun to use the word ‘husband’ again!

The first thing Zeph did was to go into her own room and write a long and deeply grateful letter to Hester Langdale.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## GOOD NEWS FOR YOU, DEAR ZEPH.

Some ships reach happy ports that are not steered.

*Cymbeline.*

‘AND to think,’ said Mr. Blackmore, when he was taking leave of Mrs. Daylesford an hour later, for he was not able to stay any longer— ‘to think that I do not know how to send this joyful intelligence to your husband!’

‘You don’t!’ exclaimed Zeph, and her spirits sank to zero in a moment. She had cherished a secret hope that Godfrey’s journeyings were not so much a matter of ignorance to the lawyer as he would have her suppose. ‘Then you really do not know!’

There was so much misery in her voice that Mr. Blackmore hesitated; he did not like to answer her. Observing that he hesitated,



she raised her eyes to his to see if a vestige of hope remained for her. 'You really do not know,' she repeated. 'It is true, then, no one knows where to find him!'

'We don't know now, but we soon shall,' he replied cheerfully. 'Don't be anxious about that.'

'Telegraph to the Governor,' said she, 'he will know if any one does.'

'That is done! I did it as soon as we came downstairs. Of course, I did that immediately.'

'What did you say?'

'"The papers are found. Come at once."''

'And you really do not know where Mr. Daylesford is?' for still she could not believe it.

The lawyer was unfeignedly sorry for her. 'We shall soon know,' he replied; 'perhaps the Governor knows already; Mr. Daylesford was in Siberia when last I heard from him, but even if he is not there now, Lord Berkhamstead will contrive to recall him somehow.'

Don't think of the difficulty of finding him, think what a joyful home-coming he will have!'

'I might have gone up to town with you if I had thought of it,' said Mrs. Daylesford. 'As it is, I think I shall stay here till to-morrow.'

'Pardon me, you must let me look after you a little, and I think you ought to stay here for some time. You have been in London all the summer and ought to have a change. Lord Berkhamstead will probably be the first to arrive. Stay till he comes, and be here to receive him.'

'No,' said Zeph, firmly 'I cannot do that; Godfrey would not like it.'

'Not like it! Who ought to be here at this juncture, but you? I am quite certain that Lord Berkhamstead would be very much hurt if he knew that you had any hesitation. You naturally wish to be on the spot when your husband's brother, and I hope your husband himself, arrive. London is not

healthy now. This is your proper place. Let your unmarried sister come to bear you company.'

'Ah, Mr. Blackmore, you do not know how things are!' said poor Zeph, very piteously.

'I know nothing but that everything is going to be all right again, and as happy as it can possibly be,' said the lawyer, almost nervously. 'I entreat you to stay a while.'

Mrs. Daylesford yielded. She, too, had a strong hope that all was going to be well once more. She would have had to yield in any case, for the excitement of the past weeks told on her, and next day she was ill. The Scatterds came and went, but Zeph passed the greater part of their visit in her room. Lord Berkhamstead came too, but alone. He did not know where Godfrey was. He was very kind to Zeph, and very grateful, but Lord Berkhamstead was not Godfrey.

'Will your brother ever forgive me?' asked Zeph.

'Of course he will—he has forgiven you ;

he blames himself, and loves you most truly. Don't allow yourself to think the contrary ; do your best to get well and strong, so that there may be no cloud on his happiness when he returns. Stay here till he does, I ask it as a favour.'

'You are kinder than I deserve,' said she. 'I am bitterly ashamed when I think of the past.'

She did stay ; she took to heart what he had said, and did her best to recover her health, but that was rather difficult, for most of her thoughts were anything but cheerful.

She seemed to have lived a long, long time, and yet she could scarcely recall one event of her life of which she could think with any satisfaction. She hated and despised herself. She had been so vain of her beauty that she had thought herself superior to all around her ; whereas, in reality, she had been false, selfish, ignorant, useless, and contemptible. She had been false to the man she really loved, and refused to marry him because he had not

sufficient wealth to give her a full measure of the worldly delights on which she had set her affections. She had been still more false to the man whom she had married. She had married him though she loved another man. She had repaid his love with a false show of love. She had revelled in luxury until her heart was so far hardened that she had actually tried to make her husband do a thoroughly base action. She had sunk so low as to be able to propose that he should dishonour his mother's name, and commit an act of treason against his brother. She had asked him to snatch at a rank that the law had awarded to him even though she knew that he could only do it at the cost of all he held dear. She had reaped her reward in his contempt. That had been the turning point in her married life ; nothing had gone well with her since that day, though he had seemed to forgive her. How he must have despised her ! Her cheeks tingled at the mere thought. And yet how kind he had been ! How ready to receive her apologies, how

patient with her ignorance and dulness, how tolerant of her insane passion for gaiety! He had loved her in spite of everything! Then she had sinned again, and sinned even when in her heart she loved him. She had dared to bring a counter-accusation against him! She had upbraided him with Hester Langdale. Never should she forget that night when, goaded by her words and deeds, and full of astonishment and contempt for her when he found that she had known about Hester even from the beginning, he had told her the truth. He had told her then that she who had come coldly and calmly to live with him as his wedded wife while she loved another man, was a wickeder woman by far than Hester who had always loved him truly. 'His words were hard,' she said to herself, 'they were cruel, they nearly killed me, but they were true! She was a better woman than I, and Heaven has judged between us, and let her be the means of performing this service for Godfrey. I should dearly have liked to perform it myself,

bnt I was unworthy. I see it. I own it. I am filled with shame!’ Thus did Zeph bewail her outcast state. And yet she was not always unhappy. There were times when her heart was filled with the hope that Godfrey, who had always been so patient with her, would let her begin her life afresh.

Weeks passed, and she and Agnes were still at Berkhamstead. The leaves which had waved above their heads when they came were now lying withered beneath their feet, and yet nothing was heard of Godfrey. Towards the end of October, Agnes was summoned home. Jack was the one who did it; he wrote and told her that she ought to come, for he was sure his mother was ill. She looked wretchedly ill, he said, and had fainted twice.

‘We will leave in an hour’s time,’ said Zeph to her sister. ‘You and I will both go home.’

‘Can they be ready for you in Ambassadors’ Gate at such a short notice?’ asked Agnes.

‘I don’t want them to be ready—I said

home,' replied Zeph. 'My old home—I meant—I am going to Lorne Gardens too; I fancy poor mother is only ill because she wants a thorough change. We will see how she is to-day; and if I am right, we will telegraph to Polly to expect her and you to-morrow. You know she has for a long time been wanting you to go, and she will be only too glad to have mother too.'

'But father?' exclaimed Agnes. 'You are quite forgetting him.'

'No, I am not. I mean to stay with him while you are away. I can do all that is wanted.'

'You? Impossible! He would not consent, and you would hate it. You would not be able to endure being at home now—you have forgotten what it is.'

'Oh no, I have not—I want to go—father will let me write for him—he is used to having me—Agnes, don't make any opposition; going away now may even save mother's life.'

They went—they found that Mrs. Treherne



really was suffering from nothing but close confinement to one room. All was speedily arranged with Polly, and next day Mrs. Treherne and Agnes were on their way to Alminster, Mrs. Treherne looking better already, and delighting in the idea of going to see her cousin Everilda and the dearly loved places which she had not seen since she was a girl.

And Zeph was once more in her garret under the roof, and her father's companion at the desk. He had submitted to the necessity of giving his wife a holiday, and now that she was gone he was speedily reconciled to the change of helpmate. What thoughts coursed through Zeph's mind that first morning she sat by his side! 'You must make me work, dear,' she had said, but in reality he had nothing for her to do. So she arranged her work herself, and patiently and faithfully performed every service which her mother was in the habit of doing—nothing was too trivial, nothing too menial for her. 'You may sweep a room to the glory of God,' says George Herbert—Zeph

did so. Noiselessly and punctually she each day did what was expected of her, and in doing it her soul found peace. Work drove out thought—the delight of being of use filled her mind. And yet often after sitting for hours with her father she found that she had done nothing more for him than pick up a pen or find a mislaid sheet of paper, but he always said ‘Thank you, my dearest child,’ and gave her a cheering smile. There are other ways of helping those we love than performing tasks which are visible to the naked eye.

‘Keep mother as long as you can,’ she wrote to her sisters; ‘father does not seem to miss her.’ Thus far had she written when she thought of all that this sentence would mean to her poor mother, who believed that her husband could not exist without her. Zeph took another sheet of paper, and wrote, ‘Keep mother as long as you can, for we are going on very well here, and it is a real boon to me to have anything to do which makes me feel that I can contribute to any one’s happiness. My

dear sisters, life is very quiet here, but very happy.'

At last, but not until the Christmas holidays began, Mrs. Treherne and Agnes came home. Polly and her husband were coming to pay a visit to the Simonds, so they waited for them and all travelled to London together. Mrs. Treherne was radiant with health and happiness, and so pretty that it was a pleasure to look at her. The very day after her return she fell into her accustomed place—Zeph was superseded.

'I suppose I must go back to Ambassadors' Gate,' said she to Agnes, 'but I don't seem to like the idea.'

'Oh, wait a little longer,' pleaded Agnes; 'it is like old times having you, and now that Polly is back again, let us all be together.'

Polly came in that very evening—John had gone to some public dinner, and she was to stay with her sisters until he came to fetch her on his way home. They were very happy together—hours passed almost like minutes—Zeph had

not been so happy for more than a year. She was lying on the sofa with her face turned to her sisters—they were both by the fire. Suddenly Agnes said, ‘Is it not strange how when one is quite gay and happy some thought that has nothing whatever to do with anything that is being said or done will keep coming into one’s mind? There is something that will force itself into mine, now, whether I will or not, and it has gone on doing it all the evening.’

‘What is it?’ asked Zeph; but Agnes was silent.

‘Do say,’ said Zeph, and yet she felt as if she knew without being told. ‘Come, you must tell us now you have begun,’ she added, resorting to the old formula of their childhood.

‘It was stupid of me to begin,’ said Agnes. ‘It is this. I cannot help thinking of that night when you were here last year—don’t you remember, dear, when Godfrey came to fetch you, quite late?’

Zeph felt a strange thrill. Suppose—but she resolutely crushed hope. And yet it was

strange, for all through the evening, though she had laughed and talked of so many other things, that recollection had been curiously present with her, and was continually starting forward more and more vividly from the recesses of her mind. 'One does think of stupid things,' she said, 'I have been thinking of that myself—I will tell you what has brought it to our minds. I was lying on the sofa that night just as I am doing now, only my face was turned to the wall, and you, Agnes, were by the fire in the very chair and very place you are now—that's all. What was it we were talking about just now? Oh, Polly was telling us about Miss Everilda and her——What is that?' she exclaimed, for a cab had stopped at the door.

'It is John,' said Polly, rising, 'and I must go at once, for he told me I was not to keep him waiting a moment, as his father and mother are sure to sit up for him.'

'But it cannot be John,' said Agnes, 'it is only ten o'clock.'

‘The dinner has been dull, I suppose, or your clock is wrong. I must go. Good-bye, dears. My things are all in the dining-room—no one need go down with me.’

She went, but though Zeph and Agnes were not paying enough attention to be quite certain on that point, they did not seem to hear the house-door shut after her, or the cab drive away. They went on talking, and forgot about it.

Five minutes afterwards Polly came back, breathless, and with a strangely eager expression in her eyes. ‘It was not John,’ she said; ‘it was some one who has brought good news—good news for you, dear Zeph.’

‘I know it,’ said Zeph, faintly, ‘I have felt it coming all the evening! Where is he? I know it is Godfrey.’

‘Downstairs,’ said Polly, simply. ‘He has come, as he did before, to take you home.’

Zeph’s head reeled, but she controlled herself by a great effort and asked, ‘Is he with father?’

‘No. He is in the dining-room waiting for you. He wanted to come upstairs with me, but I thought it better to prepare you. Come, Zeph, won’t you go down?’

Zeph stood looking distressed and uncertain—now that the moment for which she had prayed so long was come, her courage failed her.

‘Would you rather see him here, dear?’ said Agnes.

‘No,’ said Zeph, humbly; ‘it is my place to go to him, and I will go.’

She had to hold by the rail of the stairs as she went, but when she entered the room her step was firm—it was firm at the outset, but she soon began to falter. There was no need for her to put her courage to the proof; the moment she entered the room, he was by her side and his arms were around her. ‘My Zeph—my wife, my own dear love!’ said he, and in a moment all the barriers which had divided them were broken down.

‘I do not deserve this happiness,’ said she.

He was too happy for words.

He led her to a sofa and sat down by her. 'I have a great favour to ask of you,' said she after a while, 'dear Godfrey, will you try to forget the entire past—will you let this be the beginning of our love, and our life together?'

'I will do anything you like, my darling; but you want to rob me of some very happy recollections—and I was to blame myself—but we won't think of anything of that kind now; if you love me, I am the happiest man in the world.'

'I do love you, Godfrey. I love you with all my heart and strength. I loved you long before you went away, dear, but things made it difficult for me to tell you so. Where have you been all this terrible time?'

'I landed at Hull this morning.'

'At Hull! But where have you been?'

'I have been in Asia and most of the northern countries of Europe. I only heard five days ago that you would like me to come



home. I have not been long in coming, have I?’

‘No. But what a long time you have been away; and no one could find you—no one knew where you were! Marmaduke seemed to think that you were going to India and Japan—it all seemed so vague—so miserably uncertain.’

‘I did not think you cared to know. I told him I was going to the East. I thought I was. I did not care where I went, so long as it was somewhere where no one could find me. I felt as if my only chance of ever being happy again was getting beyond the reach of the post and hearing of things that made me wretched.’

‘But your brother—you wanted to hear from him?’

‘No, I didn't. You may judge by that of the state I was in. I wanted to be quite alone and out of reach of every one. I gave up writing to Marmaduke when I was in Siberia and never wrote again till lately—his answer to that letter brought me home.’

‘Thank Heaven for that!’ said Zeph, fervently. ‘You know that the papers are found? Marmaduke told you that, of course?’

‘Yes, he told me that. He told me that it was you who had found them—he was delighted, and so was I, but I am afraid I did not care quite so much as I ought to have done; I was so happy when I read that you wanted me to come home, that I could think of nothing else!’

At length Zeph’s cup of happiness was full to overflowing. She was sitting with her head resting on his shoulder—his arm was around her—she had never been so happy in her life. The door-bell rang loudly. Daylesford started and said, ‘What is that? Surely my cabman cannot be taking upon himself to say that it is time we went home?’

How delicious the word ‘home’ sounded—never had she realised what it meant before. ‘It is John,’ she said, ‘John Simonds. You know that he and Polly are married—no, I suppose you don’t, though. It is the only happiness we have had since you went.’

Mr. Treherne never knew that Zeph and her husband had been otherwise than happy together. He had not known of the quarrel, so there was no need to tell him of the reconciliation, but he was delighted to see his son-in-law again, and confessed to his wife that very night that ‘excellent as John Simonds was, he could not help preferring Godfrey Daylesford.’

‘My dear,’ replied Mrs. Treherne—and the very fact that she ventured to do so showed how strong and well her long visit to the north had made her—‘I do believe you like him best because he has a long pedigree!’

‘If I did, I could defend the position—no, it is not that, it is something in himself.’

THE END.



[May, 1886,



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